

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON
IN THE FICTION OF ELIZABETH GASKELL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyse Elizabeth Gaskell's three prodigal short stories—"Lizzie Leigh" (1850), "The Crooked Branch" (1859), and "Crowley Castle" (1863)—with reference to her major works in terms of the biblical parable of the Prodigal Son representing the principal Christian creed of the Plan of Salvation. The investigation into the three short stories in addition to her major works discloses the following three main features. First, the recurrent appearance of the Prodigal Son motif—committing sin, repentance, and forgiveness—in her characters' lives and actions. Second, Gaskell's change of depicting the prodigal by gradually refraining from inserting hints for its salvation—there are many hints in the first short story, almost none in the second, and few in the third. This change signifies the increase of her tendency to trust the reader's imagination and discretion on her implication of the possibility of the prodigals' salvation. Third, her constant depictions of the parents' unfathomable compassion for the prodigal which implies there is no change in her faith in the Christian teaching of love for the suffered, or God's love for His children. This scriptural reading might be applicable to any type of literature as its fundamental function is to depict the complexities of human life which proceeds in accordance with the Plan of Salvation if the doctrine is true.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, especially to my father for his financial support, without whose sacrifice and encouragement its completion would have been difficult.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AYR</i>	All the Year Round
CB	Gaskell, Elizabeth. "The Crooked Branch." <i>Gothic Tales</i> . Ed. Laura Kranzler. Penguin Classics. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000. 227-70.
CC	"Crowley Caste." <i>The Works of Elizabeth Gaskell</i> . Ed. Joanne Shattock, et. al. Vol. 4. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006. 339-65.
<i>CD</i>	Gaskell, Elizabeth. <i>Cranford</i> . Ed. Patricia Ingham. Penguin Classics. London: Penguin, 2005.
CP	Gaskell, Elizabeth. "Cousin Phillis." <i>Cousin Phillis and Other Stories</i> . Ed. Heather Glen. World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. 156-244.
<i>CP&Stories</i>	<i>Cousin Phillis and Other Stories</i>
DNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
EG	Elizabeth Gaskell
HJM	Gaskell, Elizabeth. "The Heart of John Middleton." <i>The Moorland Cottage and Other Stories</i> . Ed. Suzanne Lewis. World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995. 145-65.
HLTA	Gaskell, Elizabeth. "Half a Life-Time Ago." <i>Cousin Phillis and Other Stories</i> . Ed. Heather Glen. World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. 88-129.
<i>LCB</i>	Gaskell, Elizabeth. <i>The Life of Charlotte Brontë</i> . Ed. Angus Easson. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001.
<i>Letters</i>	Chapple, J. A. V. and Arthur Pollard, eds. <i>The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell</i> . Manchester: Manchester UP, 1966.
LL	Gaskell, Elizabeth. "Lizzie Leigh." <i>Cousin Phillis and Other Stories</i> . Ed. Heather Glen. World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. 3-31.
Lois	"Lois the Witch." <i>Gothic Tales</i> . Ed. Laura Kranzler. Penguin Classics. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000. 139-226.

<i>MB</i>	Gaskell, Elizabeth. <i>Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life</i> . Ed. Edgar Wright. World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998.
<i>MC&Stories</i>	Gaskell, Elizabeth. <i>The Moorland Cottage and Other Stories</i> . Ed. Suzanne Lewis. World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995.
<i>MLL</i>	Gaskell, Elizabeth. "My Lady Ludlow." <i>My Lady Ludlow and Other Stories</i> . Ed. Edgar Wright. World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989.
<i>NS</i>	Gaskell, Elizabeth. <i>North and South</i> . Ed. Angus Easson. World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982.
<i>O&I</i>	Sharps, John Geoffrey. <i>Mrs. Gaskell's Observation and Invention: A Study of Her Non-Biographic Works</i> . Frontwell, Sussex: Linden, 1970.
<i>OWC</i>	Oxford World's Classics
<i>P&C</i>	<i>The Works of Elizabeth Gaskell</i> . Ed. Joanne Shattock, et. al. 10 vols. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005-06. Print.
<i>Pilgrim</i>	<i>The Letters of Charles Dickens</i> . Vol. 6-10. Ed. Storey, Graham, et al. The Pilgrim Edition. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988-98.
<i>RU</i>	Gaskell, Elizabeth. <i>Ruth</i> . Ed. Alan Shelston. World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998.
<i>SL</i>	Gaskell, Elizabeth. <i>Sylvia's Lovers</i> . Ed. Andrew Sanders. World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999.
<i>UD</i>	<i>Unitarianism Defended</i>
<i>WD</i>	Gaskell, Elizabeth. <i>Wives and Daughters</i> . Ed. Angus Easson. World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

INTRODUCTION

Objectives, Methods, and Chapter Plan

This study of a scriptural interpretation of Elizabeth Gaskell's fiction is intended to argue that the biblical parable of the Prodigal Son is used as one of the thematic as well as structural backbones of her major works, by spotlighting parallelism in the plots—sin, repentance, divine compassion, and salvation—between the parable and her fiction. The pattern is examined also in terms of one of the key Christian doctrines, the Plan of Salvation or Redemption, denoting God's plan of saving His spirit children, or us human beings,¹ for everlasting happy life, since the teachings of the Prodigal Son parable are crucial constituents of the divine plan. Especially focused on in my analysis are the three short stories written in the early, middle, and late stage of her literary career—"Lizzie Leigh" (1850), "The Crooked Branch" (1859), and "Crowley Castle" (1863). The reason for selecting

¹ "Spirit children" is the term for us human beings who have been children of God since before we were physically born on the earth. Our being God's children is emphasized by the authors of Scripture: for instance, "Ye *are* the children of the Lord your God" (Deut. 14.1), "Ye *are* the sons of the living God" (Hos. 1.10), "we are the offspring of God" (Acts 17.29), and "we are the children of God" (Rom. 8.16). So is God's being our Father: "Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us?" (Mal. 2.10), "pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6.6), and "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4.6). Job, the "perfect and upright" (Job 1.1) man in the Old Testament days, records that "when the foundations of the earth" were laid by God, "all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job. 38.4-7); this implies the sons of God, or we human beings, were still spirits in the premortal world. A man's being a spiritual being is hinted at in such scriptural verses as "*there* is a spirit in man" (Job 32.8), "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" (1 Cor. 2.11), God's is "the Father of spirits" (Heb. 12.9), and "the body without the spirit is dead" (Jas. 2.26). Even Unitarians call human beings as God's children (John Hamilton Thom "Lecture VII," *UD* 59, 60, 64, 74;---, "Lecture IX," *UD* 19, 42, 43, 44; Henry Giles "Lecture VIII," *UD* 7, 28), and admit the spiritual nature of mankind: "God is a spirit, and must be spiritually apprehended. We must therefore have some attributes in common. . . . this principle [proves] to us that God is verily and indeed our Father, as Christ is our brother; that God our Father is imitable by his children; that Christ our brother by a perfect conformity to his will has revealed and proved its truth" (Giles "Lecture VIII," *UD* 28-29), "The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, God himself in communication with man, naturally or supernaturally, the enlightening influence of the Spiritual Father revealing Himself to the spiritual nature of His children" (Giles "Lecture VII," *UD* 74), and "the expression 'the Holy Spirit' is I believe never employed except to designate our heavenly Father when in living communication with the spirits of his children" (Thom "Lecture IX," *UD* 19).

these tales is that, although written in the three different stages of her career, they all have a prodigal as one of the central characters in the text, and therefore provide us with the most suitable examples for arguing the prevalence of the prodigal pattern among the author's oeuvre and also for examining the advancement of her artistic technique in depicting her Christian view of life, especially from her direct moralization or overt moral didacticism to its diminution or its submergence in her texts. The investigation shall be carried out chiefly through the analysis of characters' actions and utterances, since this scriptural reading of Gaskell's works is the study of the behaviours of human beings and the pursuit of the truth of human life.

The clarification of the author's use of the prodigal story as the framework of her fiction shall be attempted as in the following way. The Introduction contains the explanations about (a) purposes, methods, and chapter plan, (b) a summary of Jesus's parable of the Prodigal Son, (c) the key concepts of the Plan of Salvation, (d) Gaskell's Unitarian ambivalence concerning the divine plan, and (e) the process of selecting the three prodigal short stories written in the three different stages of her career—early, middle, and final.

Chapter 1 investigates the patterns of Jesus's parable of the prodigal from the viewpoint of the Plan of Salvation—spirit vs flesh, inborn goodness of spirit, repentance, divine compassion, hope for eternal life—in Gaskell's major fiction, especially focusing on the two prodigals Esther in *Mary Barton* and Peter in *Cranford*, to demonstrate her fiction as the reflection of the divine plan, and makes a critical analysis of her characters to spotlight some parallels between the parable and their ways of life, as a prelude to the detailed investigation into the patterns in the three prodigal short stories.

Chapter 2 centres on “Lizzie Leigh.” In the so-called “fallen woman” story, on Christmas Day, 1836, Anne Leigh, who has long been praying to God for her to be able to meet her long-lost erring daughter Lizzie, consoles herself by reading the parable in Scripture, with the conviction that the day will certainly come when her stern husband should melt for Lizzie: “she read again the words of bitter sorrow and deep humiliation; but most of all, she paused and brightened over the father’s tender reception of the repentant prodigal” (emphasis added).² The other reference to the parable is found in the scene where the eponymous heroine’s mother Anne Leigh’s deep compassion for her fallen daughter is most explicit in her utterance made when she succeeds in finding her lost daughter at long last. The merciful mother tells Lizzie that she has been reading the verses of “the father’s tender reception of the repentant prodigal”: “Thou hast not forgot thy Bible, I’ll be bound, for thou wert always a scholar. I’m no reader, but I learnt off them texts to comfort me a bit, and I’ve said them many a time a day to myself. Lizzie, lass, don’t hide thy head so; it’s thy mother as is speaking to thee” (“LL” 30; emphasis added). The references to the Apostle Luke’s record of the prodigal son are all made in association with a mother’s divine, unconditional love for her sinful child.

Chapter 3 focuses on “The Crooked Branch.” Hester Huntroyd, referring to the biblical parable of the father’s willing acceptance of his prodigal child, reassures Bessy, her niece and the fiancée of her missing son Benjamin, by asserting that as the father willingly accepted his penitent prodigal in the parable, so would her husband Nathan surely forgive their spoiled son: “Eh! but thatten’s a pretty

² “LL” 5. All page references to “Lizzie Leigh” hereafter are to the Oxford World Classics edition, and inserted into the text parenthetically with the abbreviation as above.

story i' the Gospel about the Prodigal, who'd to eat the pigs' vittle at one time, but ended i' clover in his father's house. And I'm sure our Nathan'll be ready to forgive him, and love him, and make much of him" (emphasis added).³ In answer to the barrister's inquiry at the court trial, Nathan admits his son's devilish shout to strangle his own mother, who has always believed her son's safe return home as in the gospel parable: "she had allays thought he would come back to us, like the Prodigal i' t Gospels" ("CB" 268). What is disclosed in court is Benjamin's merciless words to his own merciful mother: "hold th' oud woman's throat if she did na stop her noise" ("CB" 270). The "exposure of filial callousness" in the climax scene is "so painful" to the Huntroyds, to the assize court, and to the reader (Angus Eason, *EG* 213), yet, even in this scene, Hester is so thoughtful of her son as to hesitate to give the prisoners' counsel her answer which might cause disadvantages to Benjamin: "Is it do him harm, sir?" ("CB" 269).

Chapter 4 discusses "Crowley Castle" (1863). The narrator elucidates the regret of the proud Theresa Crawley, the baronet Sir Mark's only daughter, who makes a careless choice of her husband and feels misery in "her ill-starred marriage," by comparing her to the prodigal: "She might have gone home like a poor prodigal to her father," if the married couple of her cousin and old fiancé Duke and her old friend Bessy "had not . . . reigned triumphant in her place, both in her father's heart and in her father's home" (emphasis added).⁴ After the accidental death of her French husband, she returns to Crowley Castle, where she is by a quirk of fate blessed with marrying Duke, who lost his wife. When he learns that

³ "CB" 252. All page references to "The Crooked Branch" hereafter are to the Penguin Classical edition *Gothic Tales*, and inserted into the text parenthetically with the abbreviation as above.

⁴ CC" 4: 352. All page references to "Crowley Castle" hereafter are to the Pickering and Chatto edition, and inserted into the text parenthetically with the abbreviation as above.

Bessy was poisoned by his second wife's bonne Victorine to fulfil her mistress's desire to marry him, and that Victorine's plot was known to her lady, the devastated Duke decides to leave Theresa, who dies a lonely death without being given any opportunity to clear up his misunderstanding. This ending evokes unfairness and unreasonableness of the author's treatment of Theresa in the reader's mind.

The Conclusion summarizes the argument above and verifies our hypothesis that the biblical story of the Prodigal lies as one of the pivotal themes and the structural cores in Gaskell's works, and that the direct or indirect references to the Heavenly Father's Plan of Redemption are inserted as the religious rationale for the author's humanitarian messages hidden in her depiction of the prodigal characters. The analysis of Gaskell's three prodigal short stories discloses the change of Gaskell's technique of manoeuvring the reader's response. In "Lizzie Leigh," the narrator's direct insertion of Christian compassion to the prodigal is so conspicuous that the reader will hardly have difficulty in expecting (and hoping) Lizzie's heavenly redemption. "The Crooked Branch" only intimates that the Huntroyd family should be rewarded for their compassion and charity towards their prodigal not in this world but in the next, and gives little reference to Benjamin's future to keep the reader in suspense or rather in doubt as to his earthly and heavenly salvation. "Crowley Castle," which delineates the prodigal Theresa's spiritual growth through her ordeals and her husband's unreasonable disposal of his penitent, affectionate, and staunch supporter, contains few narratorial references to her earthly and heavenly salvation; thus, the tale instigates the increase of the reader's sympathy towards the heroine. Gaskell's description of the prodigal changes in accordance with her career development, but her fundamental faith in God, or her belief in His Plan of Salvation, does not. Straightforward, emotional, and

melodramatic expressions of didacticism or moralization may seem to submerge in her later works for the artistic purposes, yet our biblical reading of Gaskell's texts reveals that mild as well as strong moralization is consistent in her works throughout her career, probably because they are the medium for expressing her Christian faith.

Gaskell's most conspicuous depiction of the prodigal commonly underlying the three stories is the love and forgiveness for the degenerate by the characters surrounding him/her, especially by his/her parents. The most noticeable difference among them would be her technical development of utilizing the reader's imagination in suggesting her solutions to the hardships of human life depicted in her stories, or her employment of the tactic of even refraining from suggesting her solutions. Gaskell's main characters have weak/evil as well as strong/good points in nature as does every human being. Their weakness/evilness emerges when they lose sight of the righteous way as the result of yielding to satanic temptations which appear in various forms, such as arrogance, avarice, or vanity. Those who sinned would still have chances to return to the purified state should they repent (Luke 17.3-4; Acts 2.38; Apoc. 3:19-21). This Christian belief, or salvation of the prodigal Lizzie Leigh, is hinted at in various ways by the author in "Lizzie Leigh." On the other hand, few hints for salvation of the prodigal Benjamin Huntroyd are found in "The Crooked Branch," where one of the central concerns is to delineate the evilness of the profligate who makes light of the unfathomable love of his parents and fiancée. The prodigal Theresa in "Crowley Castle" dies a sad and lonely death despite her repentance for pride. These brief summaries of the three stories indicate the shift of Gaskell's depiction of the prodigal from the object of pouring her overflowing compassion to the object of refraining from making too much

insertion of her sympathy and moral lessons into her texts. If there is any uniqueness in my approach, it should lie in the attempt to spotlight Gaskell's strong faith in God through the textual analysis of the permeation of (a) the direct or indirect reference to Jesus's parable of the Prodigal Son, (b) the author's conscious or unconscious⁵ commitment to the Plan of Salvation, and hence (c) her moralization or moral didacticism in her oeuvre, as the thematic as well as structural framework of her literature.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Jesus's parable of the Prodigal Son is recorded in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 15, verses 11-32. A certain man has two sons. At the younger son's request, the father gives him his portion of money. The younger son takes "his journey into a far country," wastes "his substance with riotous living" (Luke 15.13), and comes to almost starve to death. Then he realizes that he has "sinned against heaven, and before" his father (Luke 15.18), considers that he is "no more worthy to be called" his son, so decides that he should go home and ask his father to take him as one of his "hired servants" (Luke 15.19). On his return home, however, when he is "yet a great way off," his father sees him, feels compassion, runs towards him, falls on his neck, and kisses him (Luke 15.20). Despite his son's confession of sin and regret, the father makes a heartfelt welcome and merrily prepares a great feast as if

⁵ There are numerous examples of Gaskell's direct references to the postmortal life where her characters express their firm or genuine belief in a principal element of the Plan of Salvation. One of the most typical examples of such reference would be pious Nelly's entreaty to her husband John Middleton through their daughter Grace to stop his revenge: "There is a God in heaven; and in His house are many mansions. If you hope to meet her there, you will come back and speak to her; if you are to be separate for ever and ever, you will go on, and may God have mercy on her and on you!" ("HJM" 163). Nelly's pure belief in the postmortal life should be a reflection of the author's "conscious" commitment to (or full understanding of) the Plan of Salvation, but at the same time it could be of her "unconscious" commitment because this biblical reading is my interpretation of her works as well as my discovery of her literary tendency or device. Hence, we cannot help admitting the possibility of uncertainty as to whether her reference to the postmortal world is made in her clear consciousness of the divine plan.

he cared nothing about this younger son's past, saying his son who was believed to have been dead "is alive again," and that "he was lost, and is found" (Luke 15.24). Even towards the jealous elder son's reasonable complaint that, in spite of many years faithful service to him without any transgression against his commandment, his father has never given him such a great feast, while he does his younger son, who has devoured his wealth by "living with harlots" (Luke 15.30), the father replies that no feast was given his elder son because he has ever been with him, and will have all of his father's possession, while a merry welcome is given his brother because he "was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found" (Luke 15.32). What is meant in this parable by Jesus is the Heavenly Father's profound love for His penitent children or us human beings. What is structured in the parable is the process of the prodigal's salvation—committing sin, feeling repentant, being forgiven, and given a chance for redemption. Many characters in Gaskell's works experience the same procedure, fully or partially, as if it were the author's design to stress that human beings are likely to commit sin, but given a chance for redemption by God if penitent. The elder brother's episode signifies the Heavenly Father's tolerance towards the sin of jealousy.

In "Lizzie Leigh," the prodigal is the eponymous heroine Lizzie, who is dismissed from her employer because of her sexual transgression while being apprenticed in Manchester; given a chance for regeneration especially through her mother's God-like love, she lives a sad and humble life as a sincere penitent. "The Crooked Branch" describes Benjamin Huntroyd, who returns to his country home after profligacy in London to steal his parents' money and even orders his fellow man to kill his mother if resisted; an emphasis is placed on the contract between his evil spirit and the spiritual goodness of his parents and his fiancée. The

prodigal in “Crowley Castle” is Teresa Crowley, who makes an imprudent marriage with a rich aristocrat in disregard of her father’s opposition; the repentant sinner, despite her modest efforts to seek for quiet happiness, is tossed about by her uncontrollable fate, and meets a miserable death after all. Each prodigal in Gaskell’s stories appears to represent a different version of Jesus’s parable, but the streaming theme and structure are the same in that the focus is placed on the Christian view of human life—committing sin, repentance, love and compassion, forgiveness, and hope for eternal life.

The Plan of Salvation

God’s complete forgiveness of repentant sinners signified in the father’s willing acceptance of his erring second son in Jesus’s parable is one of the essential elements of the Christian doctrine “the Plan of Salvation,” also called “the Plan of Redemption” or “the Plan of Happiness,” whose purport is the belief in God’s plan of saving us human beings for our happiness not only in the present world but also in the next because we are His children and eternal beings. We human beings who had lived with God as His spirit children in the premortal world (Acts 17.29; Rom. 8.16) were born into earth to have physical bodies, and only through this step can our souls have experiences to grow up in the mortal world in preparation for meeting God again in the postmortal world; death which separates spirits from bodies is a step for the eternal journey that includes resurrection when spirits will reunite with bodies (1 Cor. 15.13-14, 54; John 5.28-29, 14.19); we can return to our Heavenly Father only through Jesus Christ His son, whom He sent for us to overcome sin and death (John 3.16; Acts 4.10-12).⁶

⁶ This doctrine is shared by most Christian churches, irrespective of some denominational differences in the interpretation of the biblical descriptions. For instance, (a) the Catholic Church understands that human beings, “inheritors of original sin and all its consequences,” can be saved

Beyond a few distinctive nuances among Christian denominations, we can see some common features in the Plan of Salvation, which run as follows:

“through Jesus alone,” that the “saving grace won by Jesus is . . . accessible through repentance, faith, and baptism,” and that God’s promise “to reward us with eternal life” is given “if we obey” to His commands (Catholic Answers Staff, “The Biblical Plan of Salvation”; Denis Robert McNamara, *Catholic Church* 35-36). (b) The Church of England’s view of Plan of Salvation is expressed in their 39 Articles of Faith, which includes the belief in the resurrection of Christ (Article 4) and in the sufficiency of the holy scriptures for salvation (Article 6), the conflict between spirit and flesh as indicated in the statement that “man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit” (Article 9), and the redemption of our sin by Christ alone (Article 15) (*Common Prayer* 564-74). (c) Evangelists’ view of the original sin and Christ as the Saviour in the divine plan of redemption is similar to other mainstream Christian denominations’: “Just as every human faculty has been impaired by the Fall, so it was redeemed by the atoning sacrifice of Christ and might be used safely only in His service” (Elizabeth Jay, *Faith and Doubt* 2). Evangelicalism also shares the significance of the Bible as the guide to the Plan of Salvation “by its emphasis on Christian beliefs such as the Cross, conversion, and the idea that the Bible was the supreme source of revelation” (Knight & Mason 12). Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton observes, “In the nineteenth century . . . as now, evangelicals placed considerable emphasis on an in-depth study of the Bible” (*Literature and Religion* 1). (d) Methodists’ view of Christ as the Saviour is a core of their understanding of the divine scheme: they are “interested in personal conversion and the Atonement of Christ (the reconciliation of the world with God through Christ). Its driving message” is “that of justification by faith” which insists “that Christ had done all that was needed for men and women to achieve salvation, belief, and, therefore, holiness, through the crucifixion and its consequent message of forgiveness” (Knight & Mason 30). Methodists emphasize the significance of the original sin, Christ as the Saviour, and the Scriptures in the plan of redemption (“God’s Plan of Salvation,” *Methodist Church*). (e) For Lutherans, salvation is “the presupposition of the life of the Christian and not its goal” (“Martin Luther” *IEP*), and depends upon the “deep, personal relationship of the individual to Christ through faith” (Lester J. Start “Salvation”). They believe in Christ as the “partaker of grace, righteousness, life and eternal salvation” (Start “Salvation”). This belief is closely linked to Christ’s role in the divine plan as the saviour. (f) The Plan of Redemption is a shared Christian doctrine even among some other minor denominations. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints states, “God has had a plan for our lives since the beginning of the first act—a plan that, if followed, provides comfort and guidance now, as well as salvation and eternal happiness in our postmortal life” (“Our Eternal Life,” LDS). They are unique in their disbelief in the original sin: “We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression” (“The Articles of Faith,” LDS). This standpoint is the same as Unitarians’ in the denial of Atonement and Original Sin (John Hamilton Thom, “Lecture VII,” *UD* 61). They reject the orthodox teaching of original sin because, if a sin were not of an individual but derived from his ancestor Adam, his repentance would become false and hypocritical (Henry Giles, “Lecture VIII,” *UD* 36-37). Ellen G. White the prophet of Seventh-Day Adventists stresses their belief in “the solemn declarations of the Scriptures concerning Christ” and “the plan of salvation” (*The Great Controversy* 491) which is “clearly revealed in the sacred pages” (*The Great Controversy* 67). They are Trinitarian and accept the doctrine of original sin (“Nature of Humanity,” SDA), and believe in resurrection which the divine plan promises is to happen in the next world (“The Life, Death and Resurrection,” SDA). The agnostic philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) ’s “account of his early religious struggles” which includes a reference to the original sin and the Plan of Salvation indicates that the doctrine was acknowledged among Christians “around 1840”: “It had not become manifest to me how absolutely and immeasurably unjust it would be that for Adam’s disobedience . . . all Adam’s guiltless descendants should be damned, with the exception of a relatively few who accepted the ‘plan of salvation,’ which the immense majority never heard of” (*Autobiography* 1: 172, qtd. in Bartholomew 168). The context suggests that his “immense majority” perhaps includes both non-Christians and Christians who had not this doctrine expounded to them (*Autobiography* 1: 170-72).

(a) The innate goodness of spirits—when the plan was announced in the premortal world, our spirits “shouted for joy” (Job 38.7), supported Christ when the war broke in heaven between Him and Satan whose cause was the latter’s rebellion against God (Rev. 12.7; Isa. 14.13-14), and, after the casting out of the latter and his followers from God’s presence (Rev. 12.9; Isa. 14.12; Luke 10.18), were allowed to come to the earth to receive physical bodies (Num. 16.22, 27.16). Our spirits were God’s children who chose good there (Hos. 1.10; Acts 17.29; Eph. 1.4), and therefore live here as human beings. This is why we have the innate faculty to know right from wrong, and why our spirits have innate goodness (Rev. 12.17), or conscience. We often commit sins simply because we are not strong enough to resist the temptations of jealous Satan and his followers (Matt. 26.41; Mark 14.38; 1 Pet. 5.8; Jas. 1.13-14; 1 Thess. 3.5; 2 Cor. 2.11).

(b) Christ is the model of a virtuous human being, or our moral standard, as well as the saviour of us mankind. The Apostle Paul recommends that we should follow Christ’s example of humbleness:

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who . . . made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (Phil. 2.3-8)

A general understanding of Christ’s role as the Saviour includes that, by atoning for our sins, He took upon Himself the punishments required by the law of justice

and is able to offer the mercy and forgiveness we need to become clean, and that these blessings of the Atonement are available to us only on the condition that we repent (Acts 3.19; *D&C and CH* 37). Even Unitarians who deny “the divinity of Christ” (Knight & Mason 11) respect Him as “the representative of Deity, or as the model of humanity” (James Martineau, “Lecture V,” *UD* 4) or “a lesser form of God, a man with a divine authority or, indeed, a human being, divinely chosen, yet physically vulnerable and morally fallible” (Jenny Uglow, *EG* 5), that shows us “the spirit of that Being who spreads round us in Infinitude, and leads us through Eternity” (Martineau, “Lecture V,” *UD*, 5). Regarding Christ’s role, the Apostle Paul testifies that “being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5.9).

(c) The third essential element in God’s Plan of Salvation is the hope for the next world, or eternal life. There is no lack of scriptural testimony to its existence: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3.16; emphasis added); “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6.23; emphasis added); “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Tit. 1.2; emphasis added). Its existence is believed by Unitarians as well—“our eternal life commences and our earthly is but the first state, the infancy of that awful and endless existence” (Henry Giles, “Lecture XII,” *UD* 19); “Reason, feeling, nature, justice, moral sentiment, the belief of a perfect God, and the force of scriptural evidence, coincide with the one [eternal life] and are repugnant to the other [eternal damnation]” (Giles, “Lecture XII,” *UD* 28; emphasis added); “Will not God rather choose to sow the field of everlasting life with seeds of holiness and bliss, than to

scathe it to a ruin and a wilderness?” (Giles, “Lecture XII,” *UD* 41; emphasis added); “We are all training up in the same school of moral discipline, and are likewise *joint heirs of eternal life*, revealed to us in the gospel” (Joseph Priestley, *Philosophical Necessity* 111; qtd. in Knight & Mason 56; emphasis added). As for the existence of Hell after the mortal life, a Unitarian theology recognizes it, but “denies everlasting punishment” (Michael Wheeler, *Heaven* 200). A confident assertion of the Unitarian disbelief in eternal perdition is made by Giles: “If the doctrine of eternal torment be true, no such attribute as divine mercy can have being: if this doctrine be true, a God of goodness is a fiction of imagination, the creation of a brain-sick enthusiasm, the dream of amiable but unfounded hopes” (“Lecture XII,” *UD* 50). Despite Wheeler’s allusion to “Gaskell’s lack of belief in hell” (*Heaven* 202), there are some passages regarding her recognition of its existence in her works—indeed, in a letter to her friend Eliza Fox dated April 1850, she expresses her idea of Hell as a place where we shall have the pricks of conscience (*Letters* 110). For example, (i) the penitent streetwalker Esther’s lamentation about her prostitution in *Mary Barton*, “I’ve done that since, which separates us as far asunder as heaven and hell can be” (189; emphasis added), (ii) the narrator’s description of Richard Carr, a devotee of Oliver Cromwell, at the night of his death, “you hear the flocks of wild geese skirl, crying out for his true follower Richard Carr to accompany him in the terrible chase the fiends were giving him before carrying him down to hell.” (“Morton Hall,” P&C 3:25), and (iii) Alice Rose’s admonition to Philip Hepburn, who neglected the year-end night prayer, “I can do nought again Satan, but I can speak to them as can; an’ we’ll see which pulls hardest, for it’ll be better for thee to be riven and rent i’ twain than to go body and soul to hell” (*SL* 163; emphasis added). What a Unitarian theory denies is the idea of

“endless life in Hell” (Martineau, “Lecture VI,” *UD* 18) or “Eternal torments which no *heart* believes, which no man trembles to conceive” (Thom, “Lecture I,” *UD* 35), not the existence of Hell itself. For Unitarians, Hell denotes the tormenting qualms of conscience, or “the agonies which man’s own sense of wrong and degradation heap upon his overwhelmed and sunken spirit” (Giles, “Lecture VII,” *UD* 6). “The everlasting hell” is something “which . . . grew out of the mistakes of the vulgar, and the speculations of the learned” (Giles, “Lecture XII,” *UD* 22).

As seen above, the Plan of Salvation is one of the crucial Christian doctrines which has a close affinity with the teachings of the prodigal story. In addition to God’s complete forgiveness of repentant sinners signified in the father’s willing acceptance of his erring second son in Jesus’s parable of the prodigal, there are many more essential elements in this divine scheme, such as spirit vs flesh, Christ vs Satan, good vs evil, repentance of sinners, human compassion, moral integrity, parents’ selfless love for their children, the significance of the Bible, and the reference to the premortal, mortal, and postmortal worlds. Inevitably, the investigation into the prodigal pattern in Gaskell’s works instigates the analysis of her depiction of these doctrinal elements, and hence the examination of the actual situation of her moralization or moral didacticism throughout her literary career. This dissertation is intended to argue that these features recur so consistently across Gaskell’s fiction that they reveal its backbone. The analysis of Gaskell’s Christianity from this angle has never been attempted to the best of my knowledge.

Unitarian Ambivalence

Gaskell’s Unitarian view of the Plan of Salvation is ambivalent. Rejection of the Trinity is a fundamental principle of Unitarianism which regards Jesus Christ not as the incarnation of God, but as a man, “an example to follow and a teacher

with a profound message about how to live one's life" (Chryssides 41), or "a human exemplar replete with human frailties" (Gaskell's husband Revd William Gaskell, qtd. in Sarah Elizabeth Adam 44). For Unitarians who make much of "reason and conscience" as Chryssides claims "Their reason would guide them in matters of truth, their conscience in matters of morals" (45), something which is inexplicable by reason is hard to understand, and hence they regard it as a "myth" (Chryssides 40): "the Unitarians denied the divinity of Christ, the existence of 'mythical' realms like heaven and hell, and those doctrines difficult to discuss empirically, such as the Immaculate Conception and the Resurrection" (Knight & Mason 11). In this feature, Masao Hamabayashi finds an influence of the 18th-century deism whose typical features are doubts about revelations and miracles, the comprehension of the biblical description of the supernatural as figurative, and the recognition of God only through reason (*Religion in England* 184); so does Julie Melnyk, who claims "Victorian Unitarians were the heirs of Enlightenment deism, with its rationality and its suspicion of enthusiasm" (*Victorian Religion* 39). Notwithstanding, Unitarian ministers' defence against Trinitarians' attack on their sect's "absurdity in rejecting the incomprehensible" implies that Unitarians are open to the mysterious doctrine of the Plan of Salvation. The ministers stress that they do "exhibit the necessity of admitting the incomprehensible" ("General Preface," *UD* vii). In her often-quoted letter to her daughter Marianne (Easson, *EG* 11-12; Uglow, *EG* 133; R. K. Webb, "The Gaskells" 156-57; Terence Wright 7), Gaskell manifests her Unitarian creed of "the unipersonality of God" (Adam 32): "the one thing I *am* clear and sure about is this that Jesus Christ was not equal to His father; that, however divine a being he was *not* God; and that worship as God addressed to Him is therefore wrong in me" (*Letters* 860). In the same letter, she expresses her

conscious or unconscious acknowledgement of Christ's supernatural quality by calling Him human beings' "Saviour" twice: "It seems to me so distinctly to go against some of the clearest of our Saviour's words in which he so expressly tells us to pray to God alone. . . . I know it is wrong not to clear our minds as much as possible as to the nature of that God, and tender Saviour, whom we can not love properly unless we try and define them clearly to ourselves" (*Letters* 860; emphasis added). Christ is regarded as our "saviour" because He comforts us through such paranormal actions as the resurrection after crucifixion and the second coming.⁷ Gaskell's reference to Christ as the saviour of mankind is found in her works too, such as "The Well of Pen-Morfa" (1850), "The Heart of John Middleton" (1850), *Ruth* (1853), and "Lois the Witch" (1859). It is the recurrence of this motif in her fiction through the mouths of very different characters that points to its significance.

Knowing the change of mind of her daughter Nest Gwynn's fiancé Edward William, who says "no one would expect" the farm owner "to wed a cripple," the widow Eleanor Gwynn in "The Well of Pen-Morfa" loses her "discretion and forethought" to curse him, referring to Christ's compassion which brought a miracle for a mother: "The widow's child is unfriended. As surely as the Saviour brought the son of a widow from death to life, for her tears and cries, so surely will God and His angels watch over my Nest, and avenge her cruel wrongs" (P&C 1: 166; emphasis added). The Gospel of John records that Christ performed this miracle, feeling deep compassion on the widow who wept over the death of her only son (7.11-16). Eleanor's implication is that as a mother's affection for her dead son

⁷ As suggested in such verses as "Christ died for our sins . . . and . . . rose again" (1 Cor. 15.3-4); "I go away, and come *again* unto you" (John 14.28).

generated Christ's miracle, so will her love for her crippled daughter arouse sympathy in God and His angels for them to hear her prayer. To note is that Eleanor alludes to Christ's miracle as if it actually occurred.

In "The Heart of John Middleton," the eponymous hero and narrator John Middleton recollects his happy evening with his beloved wife Nelly reading the Scriptures for him: "In the evening she lay back in her beehive chair, and read to me. I think I see her now, pale and weak, with her sweet, young face, lighted by her holy, earnest eyes, telling me of the Saviour's life and death, till they were filled with tears. I longed to have been there, to have avenged him on the wicked Jews" ("HJM" 154; emphasis added). Here depicted are Nelly's genuine belief in Christ's purpose of coming to the earth and Middleton's reaction to the core story in the Gospels as if Jesus's extraordinary, mysterious, and miraculous life were the record of a historical event. Later in the tale, Middleton even confesses his longing and yearning for "the second coming of Christ" ("HJM" 156), a crucial element of the Plan of Salvation which presupposes Christ is the Son of God.⁸ Christ as Saviour appears also in Middleton's humble repentance of his self-seeking prayer for revenge upon Dick Jackson, the cause of his wife Nelly's lifelong and fatal injury: "he was the conquered enemy, over whom I gloated, with my Bible in my hand—that Bible which contained our Saviour's words on the Cross" ("HJM" 156-57; emphasis added). Jesus's words here referred to are "Father, forgive them; for they

⁸ There is no lack of biblical references to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. For instance, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14.18-19); "I go away, and come *again* unto you" (John 14.28); "he shall stand at the latter *day* upon the earth" (Job 19.25); "Son of man came with the clouds of heaven" (Dan. 7.13, Luke 21.27); "Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father" (Matt. 16.27, 25.31, 26.64); "this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1.11); "Lord himself shall descend from heaven" (1 Thess. 4.16); "Jesus shall be revealed from heaven" (2 Thess. 1.7); "Lord will come as a thief in the night" (2 Pet. 3.10); "Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints" (Jude 1.14); "I come quickly" (Rev. 3.11).

know not what they do" (Luke 23.24). In this quotation, the "old" ("HJM" 165) narrator Middleton sneers at his contradictory young self who rejoiced at the fulfilment of Jews' revenge upon their enemy while holding Nelly's Scripture which contains Christ's prayer to His Father for forgiveness of His persecutors. The narrator's choice of the pronoun "our" in front of "Saviour" denotes his affinity to as well as his faith in Christ, who is the only Saviour of human beings—a crucial concept in the Plan of Redemption. At the climactic stormy night, when his nearly twenty-year long "HJM" 147, 151, 161) enemy Dick appears in front of him as an old convict asking for a short rest, Middleton goes out of his house to bring in the police while he is asleep, but is stopped by his daughter Grace conveying her mother's message to "come back and speak to her" ("HJM" 163). Dick wakes up and, understanding where the storm has "driven him to shelter," confesses the painful pangs of the haunting guilty conscience and offers a heartfelt apology to the dying Nelly: "you have been in my dreams for ever—the hunting of men has not been so terrible as the hunting of your spirit." Nelly's answer is, "It was a moment of passion; I never bore you malice for it. I forgive you; and so does John, I trust." To gladden her sinking heart, John says, "I forgive you, Richard; I will befriend you in your trouble," and thus his "burning burden of a sinful, angry heart" is "taken off" ("HJM" 165).

Gaskell's scriptural view of the divine plan implied in her reference to Christ's extraordinary, mysterious, and miraculous life is found also in Revd Benson's encouragement to Ruth to fear not the world but God in facing public prejudice against her illegitimate child Leonard:

"Teach him to bid a noble, Christian welcome to the trials which God sends—and this is one of them. Teach him not to look on a life of

struggle, and perhaps of disappointment and incompleteness, as a sad and mournful end, but as the means permitted to the heroes and warriors in the army of Christ, by which to show their faithful following. Tell him of the hard and thorny path which was trodden once by the bleeding feet of One. Ruth! think of the Saviour's life and cruel death, and of His divine faithfulness." (*RU* 357-58; emphasis added)

This citation manifests Revd Benson's (a) positive outlook on life's trials based on his genuine trust in God's providence, (b) pride as a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, and (c) belief in the Redeemer's silent forbearance towards His mortal self's earthly sufferings. However, the Dissenting (*RU* 113) minister's emphasis on Christ's virtues is confusing in a sense because it could be read as articulating both a Unitarian view of Christ "as a manly teacher and not as a sacrifice" (Adam 32) and the scriptural account of Christ as a sacrifice for human beings (John 3.16-17) by his calling Him "Saviour."

In "Lois the Witch," asked by "the magistrates and ministers of Salem" ("Lois" 217) to confess her guilt for witchcraft, Lois Barclay, an "only eighteen" ("Lois" 214) -year-old immigrant from Barford near Warwick ("Lois" 140), declares her innocence:

"Sirs, I must choose death with a quiet conscience, rather than life to be gained by a lie. I am not a witch. I know not hardly what you mean when you say I am. I have done many, many things very wrong in my life; but I think God will forgive me them for my Saviour's sake." ("Lois" 218; emphasis added)

Lois's understanding of Christ's role as the redeemer of her sin is explicit in this quotation. According to Scriptures, Christ came to the earth as the Son of God and

died an innocent death to redeem human beings from sin: In Christ “we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1.14; Eph. 1.7). Thus, Lois’s understanding of Christ is in accordance with the doctrine of Plan of Salvation.

Unitarian ambivalence in this acknowledgement of Christ both as a virtuous man and our divine Saviour is found also in the letter dated 2 Feb. 1839 by the three leading Unitarian ministers—John Hamilton Thom, Henry Giles, and James Martineau—in which they call Him “Saviour” (“Correspondence,” *UD* 13). Jesus Christ is called the saviour of us human beings because he saves us from sin through his crucifixion and resurrection as prophesied in Scriptures (Matt. 1.4; Luke 2.11; Acts 13.23; 2 Tim. 1.10; 1 John 4.14). When it is taken into account that their general understanding of Jesus is simply “a man with a divine authority,” “a teacher and example, not a vehicle of grace” (Ugnow, *EG* 5), and “a truly human figure,” not “a miracle worker” (Chryssides 41-42), Unitarians’ calling Christ “saviour” could be an unconscious manifestation of their belief in His divinity.

Unitarians who respect Christ as the model of a righteous man consider that they should have “the personal holiness and love, the Christ-like spirit and the Christ-like life” (Thom, “Lecture I,” *UD* 25). Affirming Nelly’s Christ-like goodness in “The Heart of John Middleton,” Benjamine Toussaint-Thiriet observes, “Nelly’s part in the story is . . . that of a Christ-like figure” (76). The critic construes this artistic device as a reflection of Gaskell’s Unitarian belief in the humanity of Christ: “the Unitarians’ humanitarian beliefs and Elizabeth Gaskell’s own firm conviction that Christ was not His Father’s equal, a conviction which enabled her to depict ordinary men—or rather, in most of her works, including this one, women—as Christ figures, leading their fellow-men, and the novelist’s readers,

towards God by teaching them about the virtues of love and forgiveness” (66). Adam offers a similar reading of Gaskell’s leading characters as models of Christ-like integrity: “Many of her short stories fictionalise her belief in a manly Christ” (32).

On the other hand, referring to a Gaskell’s letter where she calls Christ “our Saviour,” “tender Saviour,” and “divine a being” (*Letters* 860), Emma Louise Carroll hints at Gaskell’s certain recognition of the divinity of Christ: “We can however make some assumptions about her beliefs, for we can gather from a letter to her daughter Marianne that she was probably . . . an Arian,⁹ and held some belief in the divinity of Jesus” (17). In addition, in a record of his public lecture, Revd Thom manifests his faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God:

The Gospels must be true; they were drawn from a living original; they were founded on reality. The character of Christ is not fiction; he was what he claimed to be, and what his followers attested. Nor is this all. Jesus not only *was*, he is still, the Son of God,—the Saviour of the world. He exists now; he has entered that Heaven to which he

⁹ “Of, pertaining to, or adhering to the doctrine of, Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria in the 4th c., who denied that Jesus Christ was *consubstantial*, or of the same essence or substance with God” (“Arian,” def. 2, *OED*). The doctrine comes from the ancient heretic theologian Arius (c. 256-336), who “advanced the theory that Jesus was not co-equal or co-eternal with God to renounce the Trinity” (Adam 17; Chryssides 28). It is a disbelief in the divinity of Christ, but Carroll refers to Gaskell’s Arianism here to intimate that, in spite of her confession, there seems a tendency to the opposite effect in her Unitarian faith. Socinianism, a “Christian religious movement and doctrine characterized by antitrinitarianism, rationalism, and denial of the divinity of Jesus” (“Socinianism,” *OED*) that “was developed around the same time as the Protestant Reformation (1517-1648) by Italian humanist Lelio Sozzini and later promulgated by his cousin, Fausto Sozzini” (“What Is Socinianism?”), is also Unitarian, but emphasizes Christ’s power of saving mankind. Socinians’ understanding of Christ’s saving work is explained by Chryssides: “Since Jesus was not God, he did not atone for humankind as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sin of the world; Christ’s saving work was essentially his teaching and the example he set for the rest of humanity to follow” (14-15). If Gaskell called Christ “our Saviour” in this sense, how can we explain John Middleton’s craving for “the second coming of Christ” (“HJM” 156), which is impossible if Jesus is simply a human being? Was it incorporated into the story simply in authorial consideration for her readers of orthodox Christianity, as a few critics presume? Then, how can we explain the Unitarian ministers’ statement about their recognition of Christ’s divinity cited on the following pages?

always looked forward on earth. There he lives and reigns. With a clear, calm faith, I see him in that state of glory; and I confidently expect, at no distant period, to see him face to race. ("Lecture I," *UD* 50)

There seems a debate about this question of Jesus's divinity even among Unitarians. Revd Giles states, "On the nature of Christ . . . we are . . . to determine whether Christ's godhead and manhood were so united as to make one nature or so divided as to constitute two natures; whether his divinity was not instead of a human soul, or in what relation his human soul stood to his divinity; whether he had one will or two wills; whether his death was a substitution or not; whether it was for the elect only, or for the whole race of man universally" ("Lecture X," *UD* 23). Uglow also refers to this debate: "The nature of Jesus remained a matter of debate—he could be a lesser form of God, a man with a divine authority or, indeed, a human being, divinely chosen, yet physically vulnerable and morally fallible" (*EG* 5). Revd Martineau's following statement regarding the nature of Christ that everything except his moral integrity is applicable to no religious use accounts for one of the causes of this Unitarian ambiguity, because Scriptures record not only Christ's moral perfection but also His preternatural fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning virgin birth (Ps. 7.14), crucifixion (Ps 22.16), passion and atonement (Isa. 53.3-12), and resurrection (Ps. 16.10), which are believed in by the majority of Christians:

Him we accept, not indeed as very God, but as the true image of God, commissioned to show what no written doctrinal record could declare, the entire moral perfections of Deity. We accept,—not indeed his body, not the struggles of his sensitive nature, not the travail of

his soul, but his purity, his tenderness, his absolute devotion to the great idea of right, his patient and compassionate warfare against misery and guilt, as the most distinct and beautiful expression of the Divine mind. The peculiar office of Christ is to supply a new *moral* image of Providence; and everything therefore except the *moral* complexion of his mind, we leave behind as human and historical merely, and apply to no religious use. ("Lecture V," *UD* 57).

Furthermore, John Middleton the narrator says in his story of conversion that "I longed and yearned for the second coming of Christ, of which Nelly had told me" ("HJM," P&C 1, 188). Indeed, there will be no Second Coming unless Christ is the first son of God, because it is predicted in Scriptures—"he shall stand at the latter *day* upon the earth" (Job 19.25), "Lord himself shall *descend* from heaven" (1 Thes. 4.16), and "Jesus shall be revealed from heaven" (2 Thes. 1.7)—as part of the events in God's Plan of Salvation.

Carroll observes, "Essentially, Unitarians had two main principles: that 'God is unipersonal,' and that their 'sole rightful authority' was the Bible, when 'free criticism' was applied to it" (9). Gaskell's concern with the Bible is frequently inserted into her letters: for instance, (a) a humorous introduction to a few Sunday School girls' misunderstanding of a biblical command (*Letters* 89), (b) a reference to "Scripture readers" who help "any clergyman to read the bible in his parish" (*Letters* 274-75), (c) her view of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* as "disfigured by . . . profanity in quoting texts of Scripture disagreeably" (*Letter* 410), and (d) her comment on a book concerning its characters' willingness or unwillingness "to subscribe for bibles" (*Letters* 587-88).

There seems no limit to critics' reference to Gaskell's scriptural concern in her fiction. For instance, as for her reference to the Scriptures in her first novel *Mary Barton*, W. A. Craik claims that "The Bible is at the heart of the novel. The plot and the moral dilemmas that form its theme hinge on it, when its precepts will not square with the laws that seem to govern life" ("LLW" 16). Emphasising the central position of the Holy Book in *Mary Barton*, Craik continues that "the Bible is known to all characters, whom it always reveals," and that the "biblical wisdom is revealed as common ground for all" ("LLW" 17). Her view is shared by Arthur Pollard: "This Bible represents two of the values for which Mrs Gaskell was most concerned in *Mary Barton*—religion and the family" ("Faith" 1). Anna Unsworth argues *Mary Barton* is "the first English novel to show the Bible as a great poetic and psychological drama set in the modern world. . . . *Mary Barton* is not only well sprinkled with didactic quotations from the Bible, the imagery and symbolism continually come through very poignantly" ("German Romanticism"11). Wheeler spotlights the significance of the scriptural texts in *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*: "Characters' personalities are highlighted and dominant themes underscored through the introduction of biblical texts into the novels. In *Mary Barton*, ethical codes are identified through the quotation of texts, and, in *Ruth*, certain texts are used parabolically. And throughout both novels, biblical texts exert a steady pressure on the reader, encouraging him to view fictional events as Mrs. Gaskell does—from a Christian, and specifically Unitarian viewpoint" (*MB&RU* 13). Calling Gaskell's religion "a religion of love," Edgar Wright articulates her strong reliance on the teachings of the New Testament: Gaskell's religion of love "receives powerful support from the New Testament emphasis, and the selection from it of the doctrine of love as the key one. . . . Mrs. Gaskell's world is not merely

a Christian one, it is a selectively New Testament one, discarding the Hebraic element which gave religion much of its authority in the Victorian period" (*Mrs Gaskell* 43). So does Enid L. Duthie: "Elizabeth Gaskell's work . . . is impregnated with the spirit of New Testament Christianity" (*Themes* 150); "She was deeply religious and religion for her meant Christianity, founded on the Bible and especially on the New Testament" (*Themes* 152). Gaskell's belief in the Bible is pointed out by Pollard as well: her "religious reference is mainly to Scripture and hardly at all to ecclesiastical institutions" ("Faith" 1).

Gaskell's biblical concern is explicit especially in her letter to her eldest daughter Marianne dated 19 Oct 1858 which records her report of "a long theological talk" (*Letters* 520) with Charles Bosanquet, her "most conscientious" young friend of "a deep sense of religion" whom she met in the same month at Heidelberg (*Letters* 647). Their talk includes "the Three Witnesses"—"the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost" (1 John 5.7)—and "the non mention of the Trinity" in the Bible (*Letters* 520). In answer to the religious Oxford graduate's (*Letters* 647) statement that "any one who seeks in the Bible for their religion, & find it there, I feel in communion with," Gaskell writes she said, "So do I" (*Letters* 520). Her emphasis on his charm—"he was grave, serious, & ruling himself by Scripture law of conduct most strictly" (*Letters* 647) and "his strictly religious mind, & his living as in the sight of God, was doing us all good" (*Letters* 648)—implies her affinity with his Christian integrity, and hence indicates her sound morality. This experience is reported to C. E. Norton, a young American student of art history and her close friend, in a letter dated 16 Apr. 1861: in answer to the Anglican Bosanquet's question if Unitarians believe "in the Bible," she tells him what she believes is "Arian" (*Letters* 648; Whitehill 78), or denial of the divinity of Christ.

The problem is that a careful reading of the Bible should indicate that Christ is not simply a human being as Unitarians believe, but that He has the quality of God's son (Matt. 27.54; John 1.49; Col. 1.15), who did many miracles, was crucified (Matt. 27.35), resurrected (1 Cor. 15.13-14), and ascended (Acts 1.9-11), to complete His Father's Plan of Redemption. In short, belief in Christ as the Saviour is a prerequisite for obtaining everlasting life. Alluding to the Unitarian contradiction, Webb claims, "For all their efforts at criticizing and purging the text of the Bible, Unitarians remained firmly wedded to Revelation, sanitized perhaps but Revelation still" ("Unitarian Background" 12). Actually, each denomination quotes different scriptural verses to defend their faith. Further discussion of this Unitarian ambivalence regarding the nature of Christ should bring us to the chaotic theological debate. Since having had this ambivalence firmly established, therefore, I feel it reasonable to close the discussion by pointing out that Gaskell's Unitarianism has a practically sufficient affinity to the mainstream recognition of the divine plan shared by most of Christians.

Gaskell's ambivalence towards the Unitarian concept of Christ is agreed to by Uglow, who writes, "She certainly did not see Christ as equal to God, but she did feel that he was in some sense divine, as well as human" (*EG* 133). Valentine Cunningham attributes Gaskell's ambivalence about Jesus's godliness to her "Unitarian liberalism": "the logical end of this liberalism is the overlooking of sectarian distinctions altogether. Mrs Gaskell is ultimately less interested in her Dissenters as Dissenters than as Christians" (140). Kaz Oishi considers that she takes this attitude on purpose to avoid too much emphasis on her sectarian belief in consideration of her reading public of various Christian denominations (32); a similar consideration is offered by Melnyk, whose assertion is "Fearing that if her novels

were explicitly Unitarian her readership would be limited, she wrote in more general religious terms, acceptable to a broad audience" (*Victorian Religion* 114). The two critics' view on Gaskell's intentional ambivalence may partially explain Gaskell's reason for inserting her anti-Unitarian views of Christianity into her fiction—for instance, (a) regarding Christ as our saviour despite the Unitarian disbelief in His atonement, or "the reconciliation of the world with God through Christ" (Knight & Mason 30), (b) her character's hope for Christ's second coming ("HJM" 156) despite the Unitarian belief in His being a human being, and (c) the old sailor Captain Holderness's warning against the perils of "witches and wizards" to the protagonist Lois ("Lois" 149) despite the Unitarian doubt about something paranormal. If the two critics' view presupposing the orthodoxy of Gaskell's Unitarianism is correct, however, it poses a question if her confession of Unitarian unorthodoxy (*Letters* 784-85) is false. Hence, our understanding of her ambivalence in fiction as a reflection of her affinity to orthodox Christianity, or Unitarian liberalism, seems sound and reasonable. To conclude this debate about the Unitarian ambivalence, I would like to quote Webb, Professor of History at University of Maryland, who explains that even Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), a leading Unitarian theologian in the 18th-century England, acknowledges God's scheme of salvation:

Mere mortals could never perceive the totality of God's plan, although more and more of it was being revealed by the discoveries of the laws that governed the natural world, individual well-being, and the social state. What in our foreshortened view appears as evil must be seen as a part of the divine scheme to bring all mankind, through

the sovereign effects of pleasure and pain, to ultimate perfection—in this life or the next. (“Unitarian Background” 12; emphasis added)

Accordingly, it should not be too wide of the mark to presume that Gaskell’s Unitarianism champions the Christian doctrine of the Plan of Salvation.

Selection of the Three Tales

The following is Carroll’s succinct summary of the conventional classification of her major works:

Her writing career spanned three decades, and a wide variety of literary styles. *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1854-5) have been termed ‘Condition of England’ novels, and both works, along with *Ruth* (1853), ‘social problem’ novels. *Cranford* is a gentle pastoral, *Sylvia’s Lovers* (1863) is a historical novel, and *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) a biography, while *Wives and Daughters* (1865) a study of provincial life in the tradition of Jane Austen. In addition to these major works, Gaskell was prolific in the writing of short stories and articles. (19)

If her 19 years of literary career (1847-65) from the publication of her debut novel *Mary Barton* to that of her incomplete last novel *Wives and Daughters* were divided by the unit of approximately six years for convenience’s sake, it could be divided into three stages.¹⁰ The first stage would be seven years (1847-53) when 24 works out of 52 were published, including the three short stories “Libbie Marsh,” “The Sexton’s Hero,” and “Christmas Storms and Sunshine,” with which her “real entrée into the literary world came” (Shirley Foster, “Shorter Pieces” 111),

¹⁰ See Table 2 and its visualization Fig. 1 in the short article “The Christian Vocabulary in Gaskell’s Works” in Appendix which explains the process of creating them.

her so-called “social-problem novels” *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*, and the classic story of everyday life *Cranford*, but here it shall be expanded to 17 years from 1837 to 1853 to take in “The Sketches among the Poor, No. 1” and “Clopton Hall,” two study works which were published in 1837 and 1840 respectively before her literary debut. The next six years (1854-59) constitute the second stage when 17 out of 54 works appeared, including *North and South*, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, and *My Lady Ludlow*, along with the popular short stories like “The Half-Brothers,” “Lois the Witch,” and “The Crooked Branch.” The third stage, or last six years (1860-65), produces *A Dark Night’s Work*, *Sylvia’s Lovers*, and *Wives and Daughters*, besides the famous idyllic novella *Cousin Phillis*.

Since one of the purposes of my research is to investigate the change of Gaskell’s moralization over her career mainly through the study of her shorter fiction, the target stories should be selected from each of the three stages. Among her works of a wide variety of genre, as suggested by Carroll above, in which treated are such themes as the supernatural, the virtuous, and the handicapped, the focus was placed on the select three tales dealing with the prodigal because the topic is closely linked to the Bible, a source of moral principles for human beings, and also the Plan of Salvation, one of the crucial Christian principles to understand the meaning of their life.

CHAPTER 1 THE PATTERN OF THE PRODIGAL

1.1. Introduction

Gaskell is persistently concerned with such scriptural issues as the human spirit's essential goodness, satanic temptation, sin, repentance, forgiveness, salvation, and everlasting life which are also the key constituents of the Christian creed of the Plan of Salvation, and of the parable of the Prodigal Son. This chapter analyses some of Gaskell's major characters facing life's problems from the above biblical perspective, focusing first on some erring characters in her major fiction (Section 1.2), and then especially on Esther in *Mary Barton* and Peter Jenkyns in *Cranford* (Section 1.3). The actions, thoughts, and lives of her characters show thematic as well as structural parallelism to the Prodigal Son's in one form or another, which denotes Gaskell's recurrent interest in the parable across her literary career (For characters' correlation in each novel, APPENDIX 2 should be helpful). Section 1.4 presents a summary of the argument, implying Gaskell's allusion to the prodigal motif and her conscious or unconscious belief in the Plan of Salvation appear in her short stories too.

1.2. Sin, Repentance, and Forgiveness

The references to Scriptures in the confession of the remorseful assassin John Barton to his neighbouring "spinner" (*MB* 30) Job Legh in *Mary Barton* (1848) are closely connected with theme of the Prodigal Son parable and the divine Plan. After the industrial master John Carson has left his house, the dying penitent explains to Job how he has come to feel it right to kill the mill-owner's son. He tried to live "hankering after the right way" (*MB* 436-37) in accordance with the

biblical teachings, but reality made him feel it “a hard one for a poor man to find” (*MB* 437).

When I was a little chap . . . only I heard they say the Bible was a good book. . . . It’s not much I can say for myself in t’other world. God forgive me; but I can say this, I would fain have gone after the Bible rules if I’d seen folk credit it. . . . In those days I would ha’ gone about wi’ my Bible, like a little child, my finger in th’ place, and asking the meaning of this or that text, and no one told me. . . . It was not long I tried to live Gospel-wise, but it was liker heaven than any other bit of earth has been. . . . I think one time I could e’en have loved the masters if they’d ha’ letten me; that was in my Gospel-days, afore my child died o’ hunger. . . . At last I gave it up in despair, trying to make folks’ actions square wi’ th’ Bible; and I thought I’d no longer labour at following th’ Bible mysel’. . . . But from that time I’ve dropped down, down—down. (*MB* 437-38; emphasis added)

Barton’s one-and-a-half-page confession cited above constitutes a unique scene not merely in *Mary Barton* but also in Gaskell’s oeuvre where her character manifests his religious commitment in as many as seven references to the Bible/Gospel, one to God, one reference each to the other world and to heaven (two principal constituents of God’s Plan of Salvation, or the everlasting life of human beings), and through his “earnest, passionate, broken words” of prayer to God for his enemy’s forgiveness in the closing part of his confession (*MB* 438). In addition, this scene discloses Gaskell’s emphasis that there are integrity, modesty, and longing for goodness even in sinners’ hearts. Barton’s remark, “It’s not much I can say for myself in t’other world” (*MB* 437), signifies his understanding that he is

disqualified to defend himself in the judgement seat of Christ in the next world (2 Cor. 5.10; Rom. 14.10) because he has committed a serious crime in the present world. The same self-accusation coming from his deep regret is contained in the adverbial clause in his utterance, “All along it came natural to love folk, though now I am what I am” (*MB* 437). Barton’s humble repentance, mirroring the Old Testament teaching that “If my people . . . shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7.14), is a faithful reflection of the prodigal son’s repentance in the humble spirit—“I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants” (Luke 15.18-19).

This motif of spiritual goodness, repentance, and forgiveness is found across the full range of Gaskell’s fiction. One telling example is the description of the protagonist Matty Jenkyns’s kind neighbour Captain Brown’s two daughters Mary and Jessie in *Cranford* (1851-53). Taking care of her irritable and cross sister is hardly a light work, but Jessie tries to do it cheerfully to show her positive view of life: “The tears now came back and overflowed; but after a minute or two she began to scold herself, and ended by going away the same cheerful Miss Jessie as ever” (*CD* 21). To note is the narratorial insertion of her sick elder sister Mary’s thoughtfulness for Jessie and their father at her death bed:

Oh, Jessie! Jessie! How selfish I have been! God forgive me for letting you sacrifice yourself for me as you did! I have so loved you—and yet I have thought only of myself. God forgive me! . . . Jessie! tell my father how I longed and yearned to see him at last, and to ask his

forgiveness. He can never know now how I loved him—oh! if I might but tell him, before I die! What a life of sorrow his has been, and I have done so little to cheer him! (*CD* 26)

Mary's penitence mirrors Gaskell's two core patterns of Christianity: the Plan of Salvation and the Prodigal Son. All human beings are God's spirit children (Rom 8.16; Jer. 1.5; Acts 17.29; Heb. 12.9; Gen. 1.26-27) who chose goodness from evil in the premortal world (Job 38.7; Eccles. 12.7; Eph. 1.4) and are provided with reason and conscience in the mortal world (John 1.9; Rom. 2.14-15); Mary's confession of wrongdoing, regret, and wish for forgiveness is prompted by her spirit which makes her know good from evil through her reason—"our ray of the divine mind" (Thom, "Lecture I," *UD* 24)—and conscience (Chryssides 41; Lansbury, *Social Crisis* 13)—"an indicator of what is right" and "man's inner guide to truth" (Carroll 20). Jessie's reply to her dying sister signifies Gaskell's belief in the next world, or acknowledgement of the divine plan, and also her implication of Mary being forgiven by her father: "Mary! he has gone before you to the place where the weary are at rest. He knows now how you loved him" (*CD* 26). Jessie's quotation from the Old Testament—"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13.15)—signifies her firm faith in God (*CD* 26). Jessie's exclamation on Cranfordians' kind consideration—"what a town Cranford is for kindness! . . . I am sure it often goes to my heart to see their thoughtfulness" (*CD* 21)—is an echo of the reader's honest feelings and of the author's meaning for Cranford as the ideal town of Christianity, as is confirmed by the narrator: "Cranford had so long piqued itself on being an honest and moral town" (*CD* 108).

In *Ruth* (1853), the motif of the heavenly redemption of the repentant sinner is found in Revd Benson's funeral speech for the dead Ruth where he puts his

carefully-prepared sermon—"He had never taken such pains with any sermon" (*RU* 456)—away and starts to read Revelation 7.9-17 instead. Seeing from the pulpit not only his well-known congregation but also "many strangers—the still more numerous poor—one or two wild-looking outcasts, who stood afar off, but wept silently and continually," his heart grows "very full" (*RU* 456-57). Ruth was seduced and deserted by "young and elegant" gentleman (*RU* 15) Henry Bellingham, rescued by Revd Benson, learned Christian ethics under the protection of his and his sister Faith's, devoted herself to the selfless activity of nursing the sick people, looked after her ex-lover Henry, who caught "typhus fever" (*RU* 422, 439, 445, 450; Heather Levy 90), and died of the infectious disease herself. Recollection of Ruth's life of such "struggle" (*RU* 457) makes the old man's heart too full for words for him to see his sermon and hearers. "He put the sermon away, and opened the Bible, and read the seventh chapter of Revelations, beginning at the ninth verse" (*RU* 457). One of the momentous points of this funeral speech lies in the fact that it is carried out by the "godly" (Levy 83) Thurstan Benson, "the author's mouth-piece" (Deirdre d'Albertis 92). This view regarding the role of the devout old minister is shared by Ruth Jenkins: "Through this dissenting minister's compassion and pronouncements, Gaskell 'speak[s] [her] mind out,' challenging society" (93). If d'Albertis's remark—"as elsewhere in the novel, Elizabeth Gaskell is the closest thing to God the reader can encounter" (92)—is right, it turns out that Revd Benson voices God's views. His reading Revelation 7.9-17 implies the confirmation that Ruth, who has endured "tribulations" in the present world, will certainly be counted in the next world among those who have their robes washed, made their robes "white in the blood of the Lamb" (*RU* 457; Rev. 7.14), and saved by God, who "shall wipe all tears from their eyes" (*RU* 457; Rev. 7. 17). These verses are the

manifestation of Gaskell's compassion for the repentant and of her belief in eternal life. The Unitarian principles stress "God's merciful nature" (Wheeler, "Unitarianism" 27) or "the love of God, rather than the anger or judgementalism of God" (Kay Millard 5), and that "no sinner is damned to everlasting punishment after death" (Wheeler, "Unitarianism" 27). Also, Webb affirms that "Gaskell had no doubt that in the life hereafter (and not in Hell-fire), John Barton, and all of us, would attain final salvation" ("The Gaskells" 165). To note is that Revd Benson has his heart too filled with compassion for Ruth to read his personal sermon, and, probably encouraged by the Holy Ghost,¹¹ chooses to read the Bible verses instead which epitomize his own message, in order to let the mourners interpret it rather than explain it by himself. Wheeler spotlights the Bensons' faithful servant Sally as an interpreter of Dissenters' "awkward ways" ("Unitarianism" 38-39), but, after listening to his preaching, what she does is not to make any interpretation of his preaching, but simply to express her respect for his sermon and prayer (*RU* 458). This indirect/covert moralization is an example of Gaskell's artistic technique which appears throughout her works.

In the idyllic novella *Cousin Phillis* (1863-64), the motif of error, regret, and forgiveness is inserted in the short but touching episode concerning "the stupid, half-witted labourer" ("CP" 242) Timothy Cooper, whom the eponymous heroine Phillis's father Revd Holman dismisses because of the half-wit's killing so scarce an apple tree in the orchard ("CP" 233). The minister has been patient with "his

¹¹ Unitarians believe in the power of the Holy Ghost: "we anticipated that, in answer to our earnest prayers, the power of the Holy Ghost would accompany our teaching of His [God's] truth, and make it effectual to the conversion of souls 'from darkness to light'" ("Correspondence," *UD* 24). Gaskell's belief in the Holy Spirit or Ghost is expressed in her letter to her friend dated 11-14 Oct 1854 when she praises her friend nurse Florence Nightingale's courage: "But she sounds almost too holy to be talked about as a mere wonder. . . . I never heard of any one like her—it makes one feel the livingness of God more than ever to think how straight He is sending his spirit down into her, as into the prophets & saints of old" (*Letters* 307; emphasis added).

slothful ways,” laid his problem “before the Lord, and strived to bear with him,” considering “he has a wife and children” to keep, but Timothy’s latest blunder has past his “patience” (“CP” 233). Since immediately after giving him a notice of dismissal, the minister has been “blaming” himself, as he knows he has “been overcome with anger” (“CP” 233). His words of regret, “I scarcely knew what I was doing” (“CP” 233), is an echo of the industrial master John Carson’s uttered when the remorseful assassin John Barton pleads for mercy, “I did not know what I was doing” (*MB* 432). Revd Holman seeks for consolation in reading Scripture—a sign of his repentance: he “still sate at the table with the great Bible open before him” (“CP” 234). Probably a couple of weeks after, when the information is disclosed to him that Timothy was sitting on a nearby bridge on a market day to “keep carts off. . . . all day to keep the lane quiet” (“CP” 242-43) for the convalescent Phillis sleeping in bed, the minister says, “God forgive me! . . . I have been too proud in my own conceit,” and decides to reinstate the half-wit “in his place on the farm” (“CP” 243). The narrator Paul concludes the episode with his admiration of “the patience with which” Revd Holman “tried to teach” Timothy “how to do the easy work which was henceforward carefully adjusted to his capacity” (“CP” 243-44). The Timothy episode affords another example of the prodigal frame and of the Christian belief in the fundamental goodness of the human spirit—a core element of the Plan of Salvation. Revd Holman commits a fault, repents, and shows more tolerance and kindness—the inward goodness of his spirit—towards his half-wit farmer who displayed the inward goodness of his own spirit. Here is manifested Unitarians’ “belief in the natural goodness of man” (Lansbury, *Social Crisis* 13).

The following example taken from *Wives and Daughters* (1865-66) draws the reader’s attention to Gaskell’s strong interest in forgiveness and the human

spirit's essential goodness—two pivotal constituents of the Prodigal Son parable and the Plan of Salvation. Molly Gibson the heroine is sensitive enough to notice her sister-in-law Cynthia's indifference to her mother, and feels "almost sorry for Mrs Gibson, who seemed so unable to gain influence over her child" (*WD* 232). Sensing her thought, Cynthia explains that the cause of her aloofness from her mother lies in her negligence in child-rearing: "I cannot forgive her for her neglect of me as a child, when I would have clung to her. . . A child should be brought up with its parents, if it is to think them infallible when it grows up" (*WD* 232). Molly's reply—"But though it may know that there must be faults . . . it ought to cover them over and try to forget their existence" (*WD* 232)—not merely reflects the Unitarian belief in God's "tolerance and forgiveness" (Nectoux 16, 19, 62, 102; Millard 5), but also reminds us of a scene in Charlotte Brontë's masterpiece which highlights Helen Burns's teachings on the Christian integrity to Jane Eyre, who accuses her mother-in-law of her hard-heartedness. In reply to Jane's insistence on her belief in the principle of retaliation—"I must resist those who punish me unjustly. It is as natural as that I should love those who show me affection, or submit to punishment when I feel it is deserved" (*Jane Eyre* 57-58)—, Helen tells her to read the New Testament and follow Christ's examples of tolerance: "It is not violence that best overcomes hate—nor vengeance that most certainly heals injury. . . . Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you. . . . Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity, or registering wrongs" (*Jane Eyre* 58; Rom. 12.19-21; Matt. 7.1-2). The narratorial comment on Molly's innate respect for goodness is inserted in her dialogue with Cynthia: "'goodness' . . . seemed to her to be the only enduring thing in the world" (*WD* 229). As J. G. Sharps correctly presumes, this is probably

the expression of the novelist's own belief (*O&I* 497). Since goodness is the attribute of God (Ps. 107.8-9), this insertion betokens not simply her emphasis on Molly's good nature, but also her belief in the enduring moral virtue which is bestowed on all human beings (if the divine Plan is true).

In addition, there appear the narratorial references to the divine Plan and the prodigal motif in *North and South* and *Sylvia's Lovers* too. In the industrial novel (1854-55), the change of relationship between the mill owner John Thornton and the working-class man Nicholas Higgins from mutual conflict to mutual understanding (*NS* 421, 432) is brought about through their humility to admit errors and their sincere repentance of their mutual indifference. In *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863), the reconciliation scene between the serious shopman Philip Hepburn and his beloved wife Sylvia in the concluding chapter centres on their confession of errors, repentance, mutual forgiveness, and hope for heavenly salvation. The couple's lives are structured to exhibit the pattern of the Prodigal Son's and the Plan of Redemption.

The prodigal motif is found in Gaskell's non-fiction as well. Branwell Brontë in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) exhibits a partial pattern of the Prodigal Son. Principally because "the man prodigally dissolute in his talent" (Easson, *EG* 157) is "allowed to grow up self-indulgent," he becomes "utterly selfish" and "worse than other young men" (*LCB* 146). Yet, his sisters try to blind themselves to the fact "by love"; "his aunt especially made him her great favourite" (*LCB* 146); to the Brontë family, he is "their hope," "their darling," and "their pride" (*LCB* 146). Branwell's moral weakness and his family's deep affection for this only son are reflected in the following citation explaining the shock they experience after hearing the news of his dismissal from the family he has worked for as a tutor:

“Whatever may have been the nature and depth of Branwell’s sins,—whatever may have been his temptation, whatever his guilt,—there is no doubt of the suffering which his conduct entailed upon his poor father and his innocent sisters. The hopes and plans they had cherished long, and laboured hard to fulfil, were cruelly frustrated” (*LCB* 225). Branwell himself expresses “paroxysms of remorse” and “some sense of contrition” (*LCB* 225). Branwell, who is brought up indulgently under the protection of his family and gradually yields to satanic temptations especially after his plan for studying at the Royal Academy is thwarted because of “his father’s slender finances” (*LCB* 145), is a prototype of Benjamin Huntroyd in “The Crooked Branch.”

The examples discussed above show how persistent is Gaskell’s concern with sin, repentance, and forgiveness, and how the Prodigal Son parable underlies this concern.

1.3. The Prodigals in Novels

This section argues through the analysis of the characters Esther and Peter that the parable becomes a more explicit structure in her novels.

1.3.1. Esther in *Mary Barton*

The eponymous heroine Mary Barton’s maternal aunt Esther is called “prodigal” by the narrator (*MB* 130). The “pretty” (*MB* 5) creature leaves her sister’s home in Manchester to be independent (*MB* 6), elopes with her “officer” lover far above her in social rank (*MB* 187-88), is discarded by him with their little daughter, becomes a streetwalker to help her sick girl, sees her death, and returns to her home city (*MB* 144) for the first time in six years (Ohno, *In Quest* 335-37). The narrator’s depiction of the erring pariah is focused on the depth of her

repentance, goodness of her broken and contrite spirit, and her relatives' compassion towards her, concerning which Wheeler writes the "whole thrust of the novel is towards forgiveness" (*Heaven* 201). Esther's life bears a close parallel to the prodigal son's.

Esther's reason for appearing in front of her brother-in-law John Barton is to warn him to save his daughter Mary from meeting the same fate as she had. The depth of her regret is conspicuous in her monologue recorded after John's refusal of hearing her talk, in which she deprecates herself as "such a wretched, loathsome creature," and makes herself the target of self-accusation in profound humility: "God keep her from harm! And yet I won't pray for her; sinner that I am! Can my prayers be heard? No! they'll only do harm" (*MB* 145). The next helper she decides to meet is her old friend Jem Wilson, who is in love with her niece Mary. Esther's confession of her bitter experiences in the past, prompted by her sincere wish to save Mary from harm, is full of deep regret and humble self-accusation. To note is the kind-heartedness of her penitent spirit revealed in her explanation of reasons for being a streetwalker, which are not necessarily her moral weakness, but an irresistible force of poverty and the motherly love for her weakening daughter. She says, "I could not bear to see her suffer, and forgot how much better it would be for us to die together;—oh, her moans, her moans, which money could give the means of relieving! So I went out into the street one January night—Do you think God will punish me for that?" (*MB* 189). The reader's answer to her question as well as the author's is hinted at in Jem's kind attempt to "shape his heart's sympathy into words" (*MB* 189). Goodness of Esther's spirit is implied also in her entreaty to Jem not to abuse her seducer—"don't speak a word against him! You don't know how I love him yet. . . . You don't guess how kind he was. He gave me fifty

pound before we parted, and I knew he could ill spare it" (*MB* 188)—, as it reflects such scriptural teachings as, "Speak not evil one of another" (Jas. 4.11), "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7.1), and "avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath" (Rom. 12.19). Indeed, these teachings were the author's motto for everyday action: "all one can do is to judge for oneself and take especial care not to judge other[s] or for others. . . . I strive more and more against deciding whether another person is doing right or wrong" (*Letters* 548-49). Furthermore, in the crucial interview between industrial masters and a deputation of workmen held in a public room at an hotel in this novel (*MB* 211), for instance, the narrator makes a critical comment on both of them: "It is a great truth that you cannot extinguish violence by violence. You may put it down for a time; but while you are crowing over your imaginary success, see if it does not return with seven devils worse than its former self!" (*MB* 212-13). Her criticism mirrors the Apostle Paul's teaching, "avenge not yourselves," for vengeance is the Lord's (Rom. 12.19). The author's strong conviction of the truth of this teaching is expressed in her letter too: "very very good people say no great evil was ever put down by violence" (*Letters* 734).

Even though Esther is a sinful social outcast, her inward goodness or even integrity is hinted at in her having held "the locket of containing her child's hair" until the very end of her mortal life (*MB* 463), a conduct of deep repentance denoting her constant "efforts to do good" (*MB* 277) to atone for her wrongdoings for her dead, beloved, and innocent daughter. It is one of the fundamental Christian creeds that a human being is made of spirit and body, as is explicit, for instance, in Jesus's words to His disciples at Gethsemane: "the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak" (Matt. 26.41). Sin is likely to be committed because of

the weakness of the flesh—"in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7.18)—which is contrary to the strength of the spirit which has power to control the flesh and to hear the whisper of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8.13; Gal. 5.17). Thus, the spiritual goodness is retained even in sinners. This Christian concept is reflected in Mary's understanding of Esther's sin expressed in her reply to Jem, who is in doubt about the homeless outcast's possibility of rehabilitation: "trust to the good that must be in her. Speak to that,—she has it in her yet" (*MB* 460).

Despite her girlhood conceit—spending "money in dress, thinking to set off her pretty face," and getting "to come home so late at night" (*MB* 6)—, Esther has been given warm affection by her relatives. John Barton gives her sister-in-law admonition because he likes her "well enough, and her pretty looks, and her cheery ways" (*MB* 7). His wife and her elder sister is "more like a mother to her" (*MB* 6, 144). Her girlhood friend Jem Wilson's sympathy for her is so deep as to show no hesitation in taking the fallen outcast's hand and saying, "You loathe the life you lead, else you would not speak of it as you do. Come home with me" (*MB* 191); he is also the only person that speaks to her "with the hope that she might win her way back to virtue" (*MB* 277). Her niece Mary, knowing her "loving and unselfish disposition" (*MB* 281), insists to her fiancé Jem that they "must find her out": "bring her home, and we will love her so, we'll make her good" (*MB* 460). Carolyn Lambert claims that Jem and Mary's "tolerant and compassionate attitude to her homeless and fallen state . . . echoes the views of the Unitarian preacher Martineau that 'even wandering guilt must be sought for and brought home; and penitence that sits upon the steps must be asked to come within the door'" (240; Martineau, *Endeavours* 502). In addition to these hints for her earthly forgiveness, a hint for her heavenly forgiveness is furnished in the

inscription “upon the stone which covers the remains of the two wanderers”—John Barton the murder and Esther the prostitute: The Lord “will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever” (Ps. 103:9) (*MB* 463).

Esther is regarded as the prototype of the eponymous heroine of “Lizzie Leigh” (Lansbury, *EG* 52; Susan Bick, “Take Her” 21); in other words, the “public issues” concerning fallen women and their “private woes” potential in *Mary Barton* are considered to be “actualized in ‘Lizzie Leigh’” (Felicia Bonaparte 81). To quote Bick’s succinct comparison between the two, both “Esther and Lizzie are ashamed of their fallen condition. Even as Esther shrinks from allowing Mary to kiss her [*MB* 285], so Lizzie, when reunited with her mother, pleads, ‘Don’t look at me. I have been so wicked!’ [“LL” 29]” (Bick, “Take Her” 21). There may be a couple of differences between them. First, while Esther is “reunited with her family only in death [*MB* 462-63],” Lizzie is allowed “to remain with her mother. . . . also grudgingly forgiven by Will, her churlish brother . . . eagerly accepted by Susan, her saintly future sister-in-law,” and, to “a limited extent . . . accepted by society as well” (Bick, “Take Her” 21). Second, while the former has already lost her parents before the story starts (*MB* 192), Lizzie loses her father at the beginning of the story and is searched for by her mother across the tale—which “is about the search” (Sally Mitchell 39). Principally, however, the narrators’ views of them look the same not only in the emphasis of their unfathomable love for their illegitimate daughters but also in the implication of their redemptions—hints for their earthly salvation are occasionally inserted across the stories through their family’s compassion and love, while a hint for their heavenly salvation is dropped modestly on the closing pages. One of the most distinctive similarities between Esther and Lizzie lies in their responses to the narratorial implications of their salvation: they

are always humble and hesitant in hoping for it. Esther rejects Jem's kind invitation to his home, saying "I could not lead a virtuous life if I would. I should only disgrace you. If you will know all . . ." (*MB* 192); she dies on the same home bed as she lay as "an innocent girl," holding "the locket containing her child's hair," and crying "feebly and sadly as long as she had any strength to cry" (*MB* 463). Even if knowing being loved by her mother, brothers, sister-in-law, and nieces, Lizzie sits by her own daughter's grave and "weeps bitterly" ("LL" 31); she considers self-reproachingly that, even if she could go to heaven, her daughter would shun her "as a stranger" ("LL" 30). Emphasized in the actions of both Esther and Lizzie are the depth of their humility and the goodness of their contrite spirit. Their responses prefigure the response of the eponymous heroine of *Ruth*, who also shows genuine repentance for her sin, profound affection for her child, and deep humility towards the narratorial implication of her salvation. Differences include the change of Gaskell's treatment of (a) an illegitimate child from the target of its mother's longing for heavenly reunion to "God's messenger to lead her back to Him" (*RU* 119), and (b) the prodigal's humble expression of hope for her heavenly salvation from being implicit to being explicit—Ruth articulates it on her death bed, "I see the Light coming" (*RU* 448). A glimpse of the three prodigal fallen women discloses that *Ruth* is most advanced in Gaskell's incorporation of compassion for the sinners into her stories.

Deborah A Logan is right in her assertion: "Slight though her actual appearance is, Esther is the pivotal figure to which the paths of other characters and the social issues they raise lead" ("An Unfit Subject" 31). Esther gives Mary a hint for identifying the true assassin of the mill owner John Carson's son Harry (*MB* 281-86), i.e. her father, after which the focus of the story shifts to her desperate efforts

to prove Jem's alibi, or from the industrial plot to the love plot (Ohno, "Industrial Novel" 17). Furthermore, the first chapter of the novel contains an episode of Esther's disappearance (*MB* 4), and the closing chapter a reference to her reappearance and death (*MB* 462-63); this authorial device signifies the delineation of the misery of "the abandoned and polluted outcast" (*MB* 276) is one of Gaskell's initial concerns.

1.3.2. Peter in *Cranford*

The motif of the prodigal appears even in such a chronicle of "the domestic adventures of a handful of loyal, kind-hearted women" (Eileen Gillooly 117) as *Cranford*. Peter Jenkyns, the younger brother of the leading Cranford ladies Deborah and Matilda Jenkyns, is expelled from his school because of his obnoxious "art of practical joking" (*CD* 62). His disappointed father Revd. John Jenkyns decides to educate him at home. Peter, who likes "joking and making fun" (*CD* 63), deceives even his father once by disguising himself as a lady admirer of the Cranford rector for his publication of the great sermon. To his delight or bewilderment, Peter is assigned by his father to do "the onerous task of copying out" (William J. Hyde 23) a substantial number of his sermons for this fake lady. The disclosure of truth infuriates Revd Jenkyns. Peter's "hoaxing" (*CD* 63) recorded next is more serious than the one concerning the disguised lady admirer. He "crosses the border of decorum (and gender) by publicly dressing up as Deborah carrying a baby" (Uglow, *EG* 287). "The Rector's sense of dignity leads him to flog his son" (Uglow, *EG* 288), who is "the darling of his mother" (*CD* 62) and "in high favour with" (*CD* 63) his father. Peter's shame, regret, and probably teenage resistance to paternal authority lead him to make a sudden departure from Cranford to join the navy at Liverpool (*CD* 69). This terribly sad event breaks his "mother's heart" and alters

his “father for life” (*CD* 65). When he comes back home as a lieutenant once some years later,¹² his father takes “him into every house in the parish,” being “so proud of him” (*CD* 72), as the father in the biblical parable gave a heartfelt welcome to the return of his prodigal son.

Peter is described as a character having moral strength and weakness as all of us ordinary human beings. Peter, who “was too fond of mischief” and “could never resist a joke” (*CD* 61), gets “himself into many scrapes,” writes “letters of stilted penitence to his father, for some wrong-doing,” and expresses to his mother his sense of regret and wish for forgiveness: “I will be a better boy; I will, indeed; but don’t, please, be ill for me; I am not worth it; but I will be good, darling mother” (*CD* 60-61). Goodness of his spirit is testified by his elder sister Matty: “he was a very gentlemanly boy in many things. . . . like dear Captain Brown in always being ready to help any old person or a child” (*CD* 63), with “the sweetest tempter” (*CD* 64). His spiritual goodness is implied in his making the spectators “a low bow, as grand and as grave as any gentleman” after being caned by his father (*CD* 66), since it is a sign of his politeness and manly pride. Peter’s yielding to satanic temptation is hinted at in his “very bad language”—“Confound the woman!”—uttered after being forced to do a hard work to complete his own deception of his father (*CD* 63). His weakness in character is pointed out by his eldest sister Deborah: “ungenteel, and not careful enough about improving his mind” (*CD* 64). Although

¹² Matty is “fifty-eight” years old (*CD* 155) when she is ruined due to her bank’s bankruptcy. “About a year after” she sets up a tea shop (*CD* 155), the Aga Jenkyns, or her brother Peter, makes a sudden appearance in Cranford (*CD* 175). Recollecting Holbrook’s attachment to Matty which happened “long years ago,” Peter, who is presumably in his 50s, says that it occurred “more than half a lifetime” (*CD* 182), or actually when Matty is in her late teens or in her 20s as it is “after thirty or forty year’s separation” (*CD* 38) that “not yet fifty-two” year old Matty (*CD* 46) and “about seventy” (*CD* 38) year old Holbrook are reunited. That is, Matty’s younger brother should be in his teens when the “terribly sad thing” (*CD* 64) took place. Hence, it should probably be reasonable to suppose that he was in his late 20s or early 30s when he came home as a lieutenant.

he himself explains the reason for disguising himself as Deborah holding a baby is to “make something to talk about in the town” (*DC* 65), it is hinted at by the narrator that the trick was actually planned to make a gentle teasing of Deborah, whose criticism of him “vexed” him so much (*CD* 64). To note is the author’s emphasis on Revd and Mrs Jenkyns’s profound affection for such a mischievous boy. The fatherly justice and pride prevent Revd Jenkyns from joining in the search for Peter “at first,” but it is his fatherly love that makes him help the search “before long” (*CD* 66). The tears he drops looking “at the dumb despair” in his wife’s face is a sign of his deep regret about flogging their son and also of his paternal affection for him (*CD* 67). His excuse for Peter’s unexpected departure—“I did not think all this would happen” (*CD* 67)—is an echo of Peter’s excuse for his trick that “he never thought of it as affecting Deborah” (*CD* 65). Because of this parallelism in inadvertency, their excuses imply that the repentant father will receive human as well as divine forgiveness should the repentant son do. The depth of Mrs Jenkyns’s motherly affection is intimated in such a small behaviour as her surprise at her husband’s touch: “She started at the touch of his hand, for she had forgotten all in the world but Peter” (*CD* 67). Another example of her steadfast affection implied in the following narratorial remark—“Her soft eyes . . . had always a restless craving look, as if seeking for what they could not find” (*CD* 68)—, is an echo of Anne Leigh’s enduring love hinted at in the phrase “her untiring patience in seeking for” her erring daughter Lizzie (“LL” 12). The Jenkyns’s “never-ending walk” to look for their lost son is an echo of Anne Leigh’s tireless “nightly search among the outcast and forsaken” for her missing daughter (“LL” 12), and also of Hester

Huntroyd's groundless but unwavering belief in her lost son Benjamin's return home: "he'll be home some day" ("CB" 252).¹³

Mrs Jenkyns' letter to her son asking for his return home is full of parental affection. She begins it with a mixture of a tinge of accusation of Peter's coldness and total trust in his goodness: "You did not think we should be so sorry as we are . . . or you would never have gone away. You are too good" (*CD* 69). In this beginning is concealed her humble attempt to follow Paul the Apostle's advice to "recompense to no man evil for evil" (Rom. 12.17), with motherly tolerance towards her only son, who infringed moral code, because "*there* is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Eccles. 7.20; Ps. 14.3; Rom. 3.12). The depth of her husband's repentance implied in her passage, "Your father sits and sighs till my heart aches to hear him. He cannot hold up his head for grief" (*CD* 69), forms a partial pattern of the Prodigal's parable and of the divine Plan in his life—God's forgiveness of the repentant—because he is to be given a chance later to take a proud walk with his son Lieutenant Peter while leaning on his arm (*CD* 72). Mrs Jenkyns's entreaty to Peter, "God knows how we love you. . . . Come back, and make us happy, who love you so much. I *know* you will come back" (*CD* 69), is unheard as her letter is returned "unopened." This grand example of "Gaskell's delineation of pathos" (Pollard, *Mrs Gaskell* 71) must be her device to heighten the readers' compassion towards the Jenkyns. Peter's letter to his mother

¹³ There is a resemblance as well as a difference between Anne Leigh's seemingly illogical conviction concerning Lizzie's still being alive that "God will not let her die till I've seen her once again" ("LL" 8) and Hester Huntroyd's similarly illogical belief in Benjamin's being alive that "if death had come upon him in an instant, sudden and unexpected—her intense love would have been supernaturally made conscious of the blank" ("CB" 251). In both instances, the intensity of motherly love for her prodigal is emphasised through reference to some supreme power, but the object of the reference is changed from God to the supernatural. No doubt the supernatural here means God or the Holy Spirit, since Hester is a regular Bible reader ("CB" 252, 254). This shift from the direct reference to the Heavenly Father to the indirect may denote the development of the author's artistic technique as it contributes to diminishing the tone of Christian moralization.

“full of love . . . sorrow . . . and a sore sense of his disgrace in the eyes of the people at Cranford” (*CD* 70) signifies his great repentance about his trick. The “fright and shock” (*CD* 70) his parents have experienced, including the failure in meeting their son in time for his departure for the war, cause drastic changes to them: Mrs Jenkyns, who “was patience itself” but “had never been strong,” is terribly weakened by the series of painful events, as Uglow asserts “when Peter runs away to sea, his mother’s heart is broken” (*EG* 287-88), while Revd Jenkyns, who was “far more sad than she was,” becomes “so humble,—so very gentle now” (*CD* 70). Their alteration is nothing but a reflection of their unfathomable affection for Peter. As Pollard observes, the couple “are bound together in an ultimate sorrow, so strong in its power that it also works their final separation” (*Mrs Gaskell* 71-72). Revd Jenkyns’s remorse becomes all the more intense because of “the personal guilt” he “must feel when his actions result in his wife’s death” (Hyde 24). Notwithstanding, he is comforted by his wife’s kind thoughts about Peter and himself coming from her genuine trust in divine providence, as is compacted into Matty’s summary of her mother’s positive view of the past events:

And she would speak of . . . how much more fit he was to be a sailor than a clergyman; and all in that way, just to make my father think she was quite glad of what came of that unlucky morning’s work, and the flogging which was always in his mind, as we all knew. (*CD* 70)

Mrs Jenkyns’s view is the embodiment of the Apostle Paul’s teaching that “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8.28). Hints for a partial pattern of the Prodigal’s parable and the divine Plan—human compassion for a repentant and the heavenly scheme of saving the faithful—are hidden in the author’s delineation of the couple’s actions.

Cranford closes with the kind actions of the mature and improved Peter. He is as fond of making jokes as ever even after his return to Cranford, as is hinted at in his exaggerated talk to Mrs Jamieson of his adventure of shooting a cherubim in India (*CD* 186); however, his joke at this moment is intended for the good purpose of “propitiating her” (*CD* 186) to lead her to make peace with Mrs Hoggins, or her sister-in-law Lady Glenmire, whose happy marriage to the Cranford surgeon Mr Hoggins is “an insult” (*CD* 174) to Mrs Jamieson’s family status. Not merely does Peter play the role of mediator between the two ladies, but also uses a trick for Mrs Fitz-Adam, who has been excluded from the Cranford society because of her unfamiliarity, to be invited to the Cranford luncheon held at the George (*CD* 184). In short, the “terrible sad thing” (*CD* 64) which happened “thirty or forty” years ago (*CD* 38)—including Peter’s practical joke, Revd Jenkyns’ flogging, Peter’s disappearance, the father’s remorse, and Mrs Jenkyns’ death—results in, after all, providing the prodigal with a chance to change from a mischievous child of making fun of the Cranford people (*CD* 63) to a discreet middle-aged man of using jokes for uniting them, as he says “I want everybody to be friends” (*CD* 187). Peter’s life is an example of divine providence, or a reflection of the Plan of Salvation, which regards ordeals in the mortal world as God’s gifts for our soul to attain mental growth, as in the Apostle Paul’s suggestion, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10.13). In addition, the fact that the prodigal’s ultimate and full redemption comes after the father’s death in this case suggests another form of narrative flexibility.

1.4. Conclusion

The above analysis of Gaskell's major novels in terms of the Plan of Salvation to spotlight its parallel elements to the parable of the Prodigal Son discloses that, principally, there rarely appear truly evil characters in her major works. Even if having committed sin, they are humble enough to admit their errors, become penitent, and receive forgiveness. Their moral integrity is also stressed: even if they temporarily succumb to satanic temptations under life's ordeals, they always keep the power to judge right from wrong. They also have hope for the next world and belief in everlasting life.

These essential features of human goodness are reflected even on Esther and Peter, two typical examples of the prodigal in Gaskell's novels. Esther's keen self-reproach is nothing but the sign of her spirit's goodness. Peter's jokes, once having caused infringement of the moral code, bring out harmony among Cranfordians after he comes back to the town; his life mirrors the essence of God's Plan of Happiness—sin, repentance, forgiveness, and earthly salvation. It is also a significant point that the prodigals are always provided with characters who are compassionate towards them.

The religious elements disclosed in the analysis of Gaskell's major works shall be investigated more in detail in the subsequent chapters. It is in her short stories that Gaskell makes the most sustained use of the prodigal frame to examine moral questions in a way which exemplifies her changing literary strategies as a Christian moral author.

CHAPTER 2 "LIZZIE LEIGH": DIVINE COMPASSION

2.1. Introduction

This chapter is an attempt to reveal a figurative meaning of "Lizzie Leigh" through a biblical reading of the text: the protagonist Anne Leigh's profound compassion for her erring daughter Lizzie symbolizes God's profound love for His children as human beings. The attempt to achieve this objective shall be made by focusing on the three elements in the story—(a) first, the parallelism in plot between the biblical parable of the Prodigal Son and this short story, (b) second, one of the principal Christian doctrines "God's Plan of Salvation," including such concepts as the dual constituents (spirit and body) of a human being, there being no righteous man, divine compassion for saving sinful human beings, and the eternity of life, and (c) third, Gaskell's artistic invention for the mitigation of moralization/didacticism. This attempt shall be made primarily through the character analysis, since Gaskell's moral values are essentially incorporated into her characters' words and actions.

Gaskell's prodigal short story whose Christian message is strongest and straightest among the three would be "Lizzie Leigh." Or, it is not too much to say that the story is created with the biblical story of the prodigal (Luke 15.11-32) as its framework. The father in the parable corresponds to Anne Leigh, his serious elder son to Will Leigh, and his profligate younger son to Lizzie Leigh. Actually, in this story, Lizzie is compared to the prodigal son by her mother: "she may be perishing for hunger, like the poor lad in the parable" ("LL" 7; See Fig. 9 for characters' correlation). This parallelism is pointed out by Nectoux, who regards the tale as "the female counterpart to the prodigal son" (*Selected* 88), and also by Joanne

Thompson: Gaskell “succeeds in embodying a feminized version of the parable of the prodigal son, in which the mother forgives the erring daughter” (“Faith” 25).

This short story has long been regarded as the author’s message for the taciturn and merciless Victorian public to pay more attention to the fallen woman question. For instance, regretting the unfairness of their conventional view of the problem in which, although the same sin of violating sexual purity is committed, reproach is always cast on women and tolerance is always extended towards men only, Patsy Stoneman observes that “In *Lizzie Leigh* . . . Elizabeth Gaskell uses not the Magdalen, but the Prodigal Son, as her analogy for the fallen woman, drawing attention to the then normal differential of blame for male and female sinners” (EG2 28).

As for the identity of Mary Magdalen, there has been a theological debate for centuries. Because of this, a misconception has been believed to be true by many people, including the Victorian public, Gaskell, and the 20th-century literary critic. A short summary of the debate shall be given here as it bestows a historical light upon Gaskell’s view of the scriptural woman. Mary Magdalene, or Mary of Magdala, a town located on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, is one of the female followers of Jesus, (a) “out of whom went seven devils” (Luke 8.2; Mark 16.9), (b) who witnessed Jesus’s death on the cross (Matt. 27.55-56; Mark 15.40; John 19.25), (c) was at His burial (Matt. 27.61; Mark 15.47), (d) heard at His sepulchre the angel’s announcement that “he is risen” (Matt. 28.1-6; Mark 16.1-6; Luke 24.1-10; John 20.1), and (e) met the resurrected Jesus (John 21.14-18): “Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils” (Mark 16.9). She has been regarded as the symbol of the fallen woman since the end of the sixth century when

the then Pope Gregory I identified this Mary Magdalene with “a woman in the city” (Luke 7.37), or a repentant “sinner” (Luke 7.37, 39) (Dinitia Smith “Books of the Times”; Atsushi Okada 25), who, in a Pharisee’s house, washed Jesus’s feet “with tears, and did wipe *them* with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed *them* with the ointment” (Luke 7.38)—the actions of repentance—, and had her sins forgiven by Jesus because of her “faith” (Luke 7.47-50). As this woman’s sins were “many” (Luke 7.47), so were Mary Magdalene’s since her “seven devils” were considered to signify seven deadly sins which are, according to Christian tradition, lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride (Okada 26-27; “What Are the Seven Deadly Sins?”; Dinitia Smith “Books of the Times”), and hence to have caused her to sully sexual purity without doubt. In addition, this unnamed female “sinner” (Luke 7.37, 39) was thought to be identical to Mary of Bethany, whose brother Lazarus was raised from the dead by Jesus (John 12.1), because the latter also “anointed the feet of Jesus” with ointment, “and wiped his feet with her hair” in her house (John 11.2, 12.3) (Okada 27-28; Wheeler, *St John* 201). Accordingly, Mary of Magdala and Mary of Bethany came to be identified with the repentant harlot who washed Jesus’s feet with tears, although there are obvious discrepancies between the penitent female prostitute and Mary of Bethany in their biblical descriptions: for instance, the former anoints Jesus’s feet “in the Pharisee’s house” (Luke 7.38) to be forgiven by Him (Luke 7.48), while the latter does so in her own house (John 12.1-2) to prepare Jesus against the day of His burial (John 12.7). Notwithstanding, Mary Magdalene was transformed into “the patron saint of fallen women” (Smith “Books of the Times”), and “her identity as the penitent sinner” became “ineradicable” (Wheeler, *St John* 201). The baselessness of this view, however, has been argued by some Bible scholars as “not

once does" each of the four gospels in the New Testament "mention that she was a prostitute or a sinner" ("Mary Magdalene, the Clichés"; Wheeler, *St John* 201; Shelston, "Explanatory Notes" 463). It was in "1969" that "the Catholic Church decreed that the biblical Marys were actually different people," but "the image of Mary Magdalene as a symbol of repentant female sexuality persisted" (Smith "Books of the Times"; "Mary Magdalene, the Clichés"; Mark Knight, "Sensation" 510).

For Gaskell as a Victorian novelist, therefore, it should be natural to allude to her as the reformed fallen woman, and actually does she quote Magdalene's name in this sense both in "Lizzie Leigh" ("LL" 19) and *Ruth* (RU 119, 351). In the former, the reference to her is made by Susan Palmer, Will's future wife full of the Christian spirit, to encourage desperate Anne Leigh to have hope for the rehabilitation of her sinful daughter Lizzie. The mother's insistence that, if she could find Lizzie, she would take her daughter in her arms, and that they would "just lie down and die together" ("LL" 19), reveals the depth of her understanding of the seriousness of Lizzie's plight as well as the profundity of her motherly affection. Susan's gentle reply, "Nay, don't speak so! . . . for all that's come and gone, she may turn right at last. Mary Magdalen did, you know" ("LL" 19; emphasis added), indicates the kind girl's understanding of the female Apostle is the same as the general public's as "the patron saint of fallen women" (Smith, "Books of the Times") who became a follower of Jesus after having her sin forgiven by the Saviour for her penitence and faith. Hence, it can be construed that Mary Magdalene in "Lizzie Leigh" is cited to emphasis Lizzie's potential for rehabilitation. In *Ruth*, there appear two references to the female follower of Jesus, both of which are made on the basis of the same public confusion of her identity as explained above. First, in the

afternoon of the day when Ruth's pregnancy is discovered, to his sister Faith, who has been shocked by the girl's innocent pleasure of having the "badge of her shame" (*RU*119) and by his rejoicing in the "child's advent" (*RU*118), Revd Thurstan Benson articulates his Christian view of Ruth's condition: "I have been thinking of every holy word, every promise to the penitent—of the tenderness which led the Magdalen aright. . . . Oh, Faith! once for all, do not accuse me of questionable morality, when I am trying more than ever I did in my life to act as my blessed Lord would have done" (*RU* 119-20; emphasis added). Spotlighted here is Revd Benson's serious effort to imitate Jesus's tenderness in forgiving the unnamed "woman in the city" for her repentance and faith (Luke 7.50). The second reference to Mary Magdalene in *Ruth* is inserted in one of the most crucial scenes of the novel where the tense exchange of opinions concerning Ruth's character takes place between the judgemental gentleman Mr Bradshaw and the tolerant Revd Benson. After knowing her sexual indiscretion and the illegitimacy of her son Leonard, Mr Bradshaw accuses the minister of having hid his protégée's identity from the public and judges her as "depraved" (*RU* 350). Revd Benson's defence against the local manufacturer's accusation is made in the humble spirit of a devout Christian which is based on his staunch faith in the truth of Christ's teachings. What he believes "to be His truth" is that a chance of redemption should be given to all repentant sinners: "not every woman who has fallen is depraved; that many—how many the Great Judgment Day will reveal to those who have shaken off the poor, sore, penitent hearts on earth—many, many crave and hunger after a chance for virtue—the help which no man gives to them—help—that gentle, tender help which Jesus gave once to Mary Magdalen" (*RU* 350-51; emphasis added). In this citation too, the reference to the female Apostle is made to draw the reader's

attention to Jesus's tender forgiveness of the remorseful urban woman's sin (Luke 7.37-50). Revd Benson's subsequent assertion that "to every woman who, like Ruth, has sinned, should be given a chance of self-redemption—and that such a chance should be given in no supercilious or contemptuous manner, but in the spirit of the holy Christ" (*RU* 351) is the proclamation of the novel's dominant theme and the author's principal message. In short, apart from the three references to Mary Magdalene in Gaskell's works being made on the basis of the traditional cognizance of her dubious identity as a fallen woman, their purports are all to stress her potential for rehabilitation and Jesus's tolerance for sinners.

There are still more critics who read "Lizzie Leigh" as Gaskell's message to draw public attention to the fallen woman problem. Deborah A. Logan asserts that to be blamed are not fallen women but patriarchal society (represented by James and Will Leigh): "Gaskell shows that it is not the fallen woman who threatens the Victorian moral framework: it is the family patriarchs and would-be patriarchs, the ostensible protectors of women, who often best accomplish this" ("Unfit Subject" 32). In addition, the critic highlights Gaskell's device for accentuating the seriousness of fallen women's predicament by letting the reader imagine how Lizzie earns money for its occasional—"[e]very now and then" ("LL" 18)—delivery to her child Nanny's foster mother Susan Palmer: "The idea that Lizzie had no alternative but prostitution to support her child dramatizes the fallen woman's plight" (Logan, *Fallenness* 80). Indeed, Lizzie's money is "wrapped in a scrap of newspaper" ("LL" 27) which betokens her inability to buy even humble paper for wrapping. Logan's criticism of the patriarchal strictness is shared by Bick: in "Lizzie Leigh" and *Ruth*, "Gaskell directly condemns those characters who believe that the fallen woman should be an outcast—lest she contaminate those around her" ("Take Her"

20). Jenkins acknowledges the novelist's use of religion as a solution to the double standard in the Victorian society: "Like *Ruth*, this story grafts biblical and religious imagery onto the narrative of a fallen woman and challenges traditional ideological assumptions about men and women" (176). In the tale's sad ending with the penitent Lizzie's bitter weeping by her dead daughter's grave, Deborah Denenholz Morse sees Gaskell's hesitation in implying a full solution to the fallen woman question in the current world: "Perhaps Gaskell's vindication of the fallen woman, although it espoused full forgiveness, did not encompass full restoration in this world, the possibility of the fallen woman ending her expiatory period and reentering the world of sexuality and motherhood in her own person" ("Stitching" 42). A feminist reading of this short story is articulated by Comanchette Rene McBee, who views in it Gaskell's attempt to seek the possibility of solving the fallen woman question by empowering female characters: "Through her taboo conversation with Susan Palmer, Anne is reunited with her daughter. Through her use of James and Will Leigh as patriarchs and symbols of Victorian society, Gaskell illustrates the ways in which silence and fictitious stories about fallen women harm not only the fallen woman herself, but also those in her life. It is through the use of speech that the fallen woman can be redeemed and the family can be reunited" (*Revoking* 42-43). The above review of the readings of "Lizzie Leigh" by the five critics—Stoneman, Logan, Jenkins, Morees, and McBee—indicates that, though discussing the story through their own perspectives, they are similar more or less in focusing their arguments on Gaskell's appeal of the fallen woman question to the Victorian public.

"Lizzie Leigh" could be construed not only as raising the social problem of fallen woman to the Victorian public, however, but also as the author's reminder

of God's compassionate love for us His children. A variety of human beings are represented by various types of characters such as Anne's "austere . . . upright . . . hard, stern, and inflexible" ("LL" 3) husband James, her "stern, reserved, and scrupulously upright" ("LL" 6) elder son Will, her "gentle and delicate" ("LL" 6) younger son Tom, her "pure and maidenly" ("LL" 11), "good, gentle-looking" ("LL" 21), and "downright holy" ("LL" 14) daughter-in-law Susan, Susan's "erring . . . useless" ("LL" 23) father Mr Palmer, and especially Anne's "poor, sinning" ("LL" 7) daughter Lizzie. Anne Leigh is "a figure, like Mrs. Gaskell, attempting to reshape the thinking of her society" (Hughes & Lund, *Victorian Publishing* 73). This figurative meaning of the text that Anne's actions are identical with those of God or Christ for us human beings is detected by some critics who spotlight her role as "the interpreter of God's will" ("LL" 22). Jenkins claims she holds an image of "female prophets and Christ figures," and that her compassion is "likened to Christ's" (176). D. A. Logan observes that, to "repair the damage caused by James's wrathful patriarchal God," Anne carries out her pursuit of their missing daughter with the spiritual arms of "the Christ-like compassion of her matriarchal order" ("Unfit Subject" 32). J. Thompson regards Lizzie's mother as the epitome of the Bible—"The Bible of Anne Leigh—which she embodies, in all senses—is the salvation of her daughter" ("Faith" 24), and also "the enactor and interpreter of God's will—for herself and to Susan and Will and Lizzie" ("Faith" 25).

The Christian spirit permeates from the very beginning of the story to the end. Even on the first few pages depicting the introductory event of the death of James Leigh, the eponymous heroine's father, there can be found one of the key concepts of the Plan of Salvation—goodness of the spirit, i.e. (a) goodness of his spirit, (b) goodness of his wife Anne's spirit, represented especially in her affection

for their fallen daughter Lizzie, and (c) goodness of their elder son Will's spirit—, and also detected the author's intentional choice of Christmas Day as the day for (d) the introductory event.

First, James dies in Upclose Farm just as the “bells of Rochdale Church” are “ringing for morning service on Christmas Day,” the day for celebrating Jesus Christ's birth on earth, whispering to Anne his willingness to forgive his sinful daughter Lizzie and his prayer to God for asking His forgiveness of his bigotry (“LL” 3). This death-bed utterance of leniency signifies ultimate goodness of James's spirit. Critics' concern has long been placed on his oppressive patriarchy (Margaret Homans 227; McBee, “Revoking” 47; Stoneman, *EG2* 38), his strict justice similar to the unforgiving “Old Testament” God's (Homans 227; Logan, *Fallenness* 76; ---, “Unfit Subject” 32), and thus his being the cause of Lizzie's “descent” into prostitution (Logan, *Fallenness* 78; Stoneman, *EG2* 38; Jenkins 176). McBee's claim—“Lizzie could have been saved much suffering had her father been sympathetic and open from the beginning” (“Revoking” 55)—might be an echo of most readers' impressions. In the scenes of James' death on Christmas and of his subsequent funeral, notwithstanding, it is suggested that his secret agony has continued as long as “three years” (“LL” 4) or “more than two years” (“LL” 7) since his ban on his obedient wife's searching for their missing daughter. This inner conflict of the paterfamilias indicates that his paternal affection for Lizzie could be as strong as his wife's maternal love, and that their difference simply lies in the way of expressing their feelings and moral values. In other words, his “stern anger” (“LL” 7) for his erring daughter could be a reflection of his deep affection for her. The depth of his anguish and regret, or of his paternal affection, is hinted at in the neighbours' sympathetic remark to Will regarding the change of his parents: “how

poor Lizzie's death had aged both his father and his mother; and how they thought the bereaved couple would never hold up their heads again" ("LL" 8). James's agony becomes double in acuteness because it is his pride and prudence that prompted him to conceal the truth about his daughter. Although both James and Will feel ashamed of Lizzie in the similar patriarchal way, the father's actions "appear more overtly moralistic and less self-interested than" his elder son (Fitzwilliam, "The Politics" 18). This is because the former's strictness comes genuinely from his faith in God's moral teaching—"fornication, and all uncleanness . . . let it not be once named among you . . . Neither filthiness" (Eph. 5.3-4)—while the latter's from his fear of losing Susan's love especially after he encounters her. Goodness of James's spirit is suggested also in his "most perfect uprightness" and being a true "interpreter" of God's will for his wife for "nineteen" years after their marriage ("LL" 3).

Secondly, James's death on Christmas Day brings to light the goodness of Anne's spirit which is reflected in her repentance and mercy. His "last blessed words" of leniency call out her "penitent anguish for all the bitter estrangement of" the past three years, when she neglected "wifely duty and affection" with "a hidden, sullen rebellion," although "gentlest love and reverence" for him never ceased since their marriage until then ("LL" 3). Her regret is expressed not only in her persistence in staying with her dead husband even if it may cause impoliteness towards "the kind-hearted neighbours" who visit "on their way from church to sympathise and condole" ("LL" 3), but also in her self-accusation depicted in the narrative: "if she had only been more gentle and less angrily reserved, he might have relented earlier—and in time!" ("LL" 4). After the neighbours have gone home at night, Anne gazes out from the bed-room window "long and wistfully,

over the dark grey moor" ("LL" 4), no doubt towards Manchester, where her missing daughter should still be living. The mother's strong longing for her girl, or her never-ceasing tenderness for her, is implied in the narratorial descriptions that she is in too deep absorption in meditation to notice her 10-year-old ("LL" 4, 6) son Tom's approach and to hear his voice, and also in her too painful effort to easily "tear herself away from the window" ("LL" 4). The "sigh" she heaves in complying with Tom's request for coming downstairs is a sign of her reluctance to leave the window from which she can look her "heart out towards" ("LL" 7) Lizzie's Manchester—another token of her motherly attachment ("LL" 4). Anne's enduring affection for her missing daughter is highlighted more strongly after tea, when she makes a request to her 10-year-old ("LL" 6) second son Tom to read the parable of "the Prodigal Son" (Luke 15.11-32) from the Bible. While listening to his reading, Anne bends "forward, her lips parted, her eyes dilated; her whole body instinct with eager attention" ("LL" 4). When Tom's reading comes to an end, her face becomes "brighter," her eyes "dreamy, as if she saw a vision"—probably of her prodigal's return home. She then begins to read the chapter "aloud in a low voice to herself," and reads "again the words of bitter sorrow and deep humiliation; but most of all, she" pauses and brightens "over the father's tender reception of the repentant prodigal" ("LL" 5; emphasis added; Luke 15. 22-24). Hence, Anne's course of action taken since immediately after her husband's death-bed forgiveness on Christmas Day is filled with her wifely and motherly love, i.e. an indication of the goodness of her spirit.

Thirdly, although having been given the same attributes as his father's, being "stern, reserved, and scrupulously upright" ("LL" 6), and thus having been a target of critics' censure for his mercilessness (McBee, "Revoking" 42; Thompson,

“Faith” 23, 24; Bick, “Take Her” 21), Will is depicted as a man of morally good spirit in this introductory scene. This 20-year-old Pharisee and his 10-year-old brother entertain the condolence visitors with no help from their mother, and, after they have gone, do “everything in their power to make the house-place comfortable” for their mother, and pay her “every attention” they can think of in receipt of “little notice on her part” (“LL” 4). Will proposes to Anne that Tom shall read her a chapter from the Scripture, obviously in consideration of giving her soul some spiritual consolation, with little anticipation of her choice of the Prodigal’s chapter which recalls to him “the family’s disgrace” (“LL” 5). Thus, goodness of Will’s spirit becomes all the more conspicuous because all of his kind actions are motivated by no expectation of reward.

The fourth Christian element in the introductory scene is that spiritual goodness of James, Anne, and Will are depicted under the general atmosphere of festivity of the birth of the Saviour Jesus Christ. Gaskell’s initial objective of drawing the Victorian public’s sympathy towards the plight of fallen women and suggesting the penitent fallen woman Lizzie’s chance of redemption is hinted at in her choice of Christmas Day as the day for depicting James’s death-bed leniency, Anne’s wifely and motherly devotion, and Will’s altruistic kindness, because it is the day for remembering God’s mercy for human beings for whom He sent His beloved son Jesus Christ to the earth. The Bible says, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3.16). Morse’s reading of the figurative meaning of James Leigh’s death is worth quoting as it implies Gaskell’s intention often pointed out by critics (Homans, *Bearing* 227, 228; Logan, *Fallenness* 76; Uglow, *EG* 126) of making the New Testament mercy outweigh the Old Testament

harshness: “He dies, significantly, on Christmas Day. Both his deathbed mercy to his daughter and the symbolic day of his death argue against the moral authority of his Old Testament judgement of the daughter’s sin” (“Stitching” 39). Morse’s claim embodies Christ’s summary of his mission: “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3.17). The draft of the story was sent to Dickens in early February 1850 (Pilgrim 6: 30) in reply to his request for her contribution to his weekly journal *Household Words* dated 30 January of the same year (Pilgrim 6: 22-23; Sharps, *O&I* 93), and “Lizzie Leigh” was serialized in its initial three numbers published between 30 March and 13 April 1850 (Dickens, *HW*, 1: 2-6, 32-35, 60-65; Sharps, *O&I* 93; Hopkins, *EG* 88; Uglow, *EG* 635), not in any of its Christmas numbers; therefore, it should be reasonable to suspect that there should be some authorial meaning in Gaskell’s choice of Christmas Day for James Leigh’s death-bed leniency.

As the story begins with the scenes of death and funeral at Upclose Farm in the atmosphere of Christian compassion, so does it end with those of Nanny’s burial and the Leighs’ return to the Farm in the same tone. Soon after James’s funeral, the bereaved family move to Manchester with the intention of searching for Lizzie within the limit of one year, where Anne succeeds in achieving her aim with the help of the girl with whom Will is in love, although they have to confront the accidental death of Lizzie’s daughter Nanny. Will comes to live at the Farm with his wife Susan, “the bright one” filled with Christ-like love “who brings sunshine to all” (“LL” 31). Tom, who once heard “the far away bells of Rochdale Church” ringing (“LL” 3) and was learning at a village-school as “a better scholar” than her elder brother (“LL” 4), becomes “a school-master in Rochdale” (“LL” 31). Anne

and Lizzie dwell in a secluded cottage “hidden in a green hollow of the hills” (“LL” 31). Lizzie’s life of deep repentance with a hope for heavenly redemption is hinted at in her selfless devotion to suffering people and in her everlasting prayer to God for remission: “every call of suffering or of sickness for help is listened to by a sad, gentle-looking woman, who rarely smiles . . . but who comes out of her seclusion whenever there’s a shadow in any household. Many hearts bless Lizzie Leigh, but she—she prays always and ever for forgiveness—such forgiveness as may enable her to see her child once more” (“LL” 31). There is a curious tentativeness in the narrator’s phrase inserted at the end of this citation: she seems not wholly confident that Lizzie will be redeemed and allowed to meet Nanny. This is probably an example of Gaskell’s technique of refraining from making too much assertion of her faith, or an example of her restrained moralization, which denotes her humble recognition of the seriousness of Lizzie’s sin. Although Lizzie’s earthly salvation is implied rather in a straightforward way mainly through her mother’s love and compassion, her heavenly salvation are hinted at in a modest way, as discussed below. By using this technique, the author attempts to let her readers judge whether Lizzie is rewarded for her sincere and enduring repentance by God.

Lizzie’s prayerful remorse is reproduced in the eponymous heroine of *Ruth* where the fallen protagonist takes care of the patients of pestilential typhus fever whom nurses shrink from looking after in fear of infection (*RU* 424-25). Lizzie and Ruth may be almost the same in the depth of their regret, but would be different in that the heroine’s hope for reunion with her dead daughter in Heaven is implied as a motive for her altruistic action in the case of the former while the heroine’s genuine faith in God in the case of the latter. In response to her mother’s encouragement for her to “strive to get” to Heaven “for Nanny’s sake” as she shall

“have it again” there (“LL” 30), Lizzie articulates a humble hope, although it is followed by her uncertainty about being recognized by her daughter in the post-mortal world: “if I strive very hard, and God is very merciful, and I go to heaven, I shall not know her—I shall not know my own again—she will shun me as a stranger and cling to Susan Palmer and to you” (“LL” 30). After returning to her home Upclose Farm, she goes out for help for anyone in need, always praying for forgiveness, “such forgiveness as may enable her to see her child once more” (“LL” 31). On the other hand, Ruth’s strong faith in God is demonstrated in her confession uttered in anticipation of possible death when she tells Revd Benson her determination to nurse typhus patients: “if I have a little natural shrinking, it is quite gone when I remember that I am in God’s hands” (*RU* 425). In *Ruth*, the eponymous heroine’s heavenly redemption as well as her earthly is implied by the narrator. A reference to her two types of salvation is incorporated into the scene where, in answer to a speaker of the rumour that Ruth does this life-risking nursing as her atonement for a great sin, an old man expresses his conviction that her purity in motives will no doubt lead her to the salvation by God: “Such a one as her has never been a great sinner; nor does she do her work as a penance, but for the love of God, and of the blessed Jesus. She will be in the light of God’s countenance where you and I will be standing afar off” (*RU* 429). Immediately after this old man’s articulation of his conviction, Ruth’s only child Leonard notices “a clamour of tongues” arise from the crowd, “each with some tale of his mother’s gentle doings” (*RU* 429). The narrator thus emphasises not merely that Ruth has been forgiven by people, i.e. her earthly redemption, but also that, as is betokened by the old man’s prediction of her being “in the light of God’s countenance,” she will be saved by God, i.e. her heavenly redemption. Ruth’s earthly salvation is implied

also in the narratorial remark on her shy discretion—a quality of Christian integrity: “Few were aware how much Ruth had done; she never spoke of it, shrinking with sweet shyness from over-much allusion to her own work at all times. Her left hand truly knew not what her right had did” (*RU* 429).¹⁴ She is a performer of Christ’s teaching of doing good to glorify His Father: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5.16). Hence, the probability of Ruth’s redemption is inserted into the text more explicitly than Lizzie’s.

Some hints for the latter’s earthly salvation are conveyed through such narratorial references as to her selfless acceptance of “every call of suffering or of sickness for help,” to her gradual gaining people’s favour—“Many hearts bless Lizzie Leigh” (“LL” 31)—, and to Anne Leigh’s bottomless love for her daughter: “Lizzie is to her eyes something precious, as the lost piece of silver—found once more”

¹⁴ The reference to Christ’s suggestion of doing good in secret—“Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth” (Matt 6.3)—appears three more times, i.e. four references in total—in Gaskell’s works, which indicates it is one of her favourite gospel verses. Gaskell’s preference for this verse of recommendation of highly moral conducts is another piece of evidence that she is consciously or unconsciously affected by the divine Plan of Salvation, according to which to live righteously is an essential condition for mortal as well as postmortal deliverance. The second reference is found in the scene of “Hand and Heart” (1849) where Mrs Fletcher gives a gentle warning to her eight-year-old innocent son Tom against boasting himself too much about his good deeds, lacking humility, or giving glory not to God (*P&C* 1: 108). The third reference can be detected in the scene in *Ruth* where Jemima Bradshaw, Ruth’s friend, is invited to tea at Revd. Benson’s house. While controlling her appetite on her strict father’s advice to refrain from eating too much in consideration of the minister’s poverty, she wonders at the unexpected lavishness of the meal in secret gratitude, and foresees within herself Mr Bradshaw’s disapproval of her marvelling at the extravagance. Sensing Jemima’s inner disconcertion, the faithful servant Sally (the narrator inserts her comment) could have defended her master and his sister Miss Benson for their everyday self-denial made “when no one was by, when the left hand did not know what the right hand did” (*RU* 182). Here spotlighted is the faithfulness of the good servant who knows her mistress’s “homely, affectionate pleasure in making others comfortable, might have shown that such little occasional extravagances were not waste, but a good work; and were not to be gauged by the standard of money spending” (*RU* 182). The last reference to the gospel verse in Gaskell’s oeuvre is found in “French Life,” Gaskell’s diary of two journeys to France (*P&C* 1: 358). The biblical reference appears in the description of her experience of attending a service for poverty-stricken workmen at a Roman Catholic church in Paris where she hears each of the helpless and desolate attendants answer at a priest’s demand what effort or sacrifice he can make in the name of the Lord. The narrator’s comment is “it was better that such words should be spoken low; that the left hand should not know what the right hand did” (*P&C* 1: 394).

("LL" 31; Luke 15.8-9) (the third reference contains Gaskell's implication of Lizzie's heavenly redemption as well, as explained below). A similar view as to Lizzie's earthly redemption is offered by some critics. For instance, "The fallen Lizzie expiates her sin through service to others" (Morse, "Stitching" 42); "Lizzie is redeemed by her love for her child and, unlike most fallen women, is permitted to work out her redemption in this life" (Thompson, "Faith" 25); and "Lizzie's redemption is going to come about because of her own sympathy toward others is evident" (Morris, "Ready" 50).

Regarding her heavenly salvation, however, there is no clear confirmation of it in the text except a few implications of its possibility. For example, in disclosing the news to Anne that Lizzie brings money for Nanny occasionally, Susan hints at her belief in Lizzie's redemption: "I've often thought the poor mother feels near to God when she brings this money" ("LL" 18; emphasis added). The significance of her remark lies in the fact that she expresses this belief even though she knows Lizzie's method of earning this money. For a girl like Lizzie, who is "turned away at a day's warning" by her employer, is too shameful of herself to ask for her parents' consultation, and is turned out by the workhouse as soon as she becomes strong, "whatten kind o' work would be open to her . . . and baby to keep?" ("LL" 13-14). There is "only one likely answer" (Thompson, "Faith" 23)—prostitution. What is implied in Anne's curiosity is noticed by some critics; for example, Wiltshire observes, "It is implied, though never stated explicitly, that Lizzie has fallen into a life of immorality, in order to support her illegitimate child" (*EG* 155). Concerning Lizzie's occasional night calling at Susan's house to leave a packet of money under her door, Fitzwilliam writes, "she simultaneously signals her aberrant status and shame—she earns money by her 'trade'" ("The Politics" 23).

Logan's guess of Lizzie's trade being prostitution is elucidated in her convincing dramatization of Lizzie's plight: "Lizzie is 'turned out' of the workhouse after her confinement and, essentially unemployable in any respectable trade, has no option other than prostitution. This allows her to support her child, yet—like the workhouse—it too necessitates their separation, as brothel owners, procurers, and clients were little interested in doing business with a girl burdened by a child" (*Fallenness* 80). "Lizzie is rightfully presumed to be a streetwalker," is McBee's observation (*Revoking* 40).

Henry Mayhew quotes a testimony of a prostitute of the mid-nineteenth century London about the pressure of poverty being the cause of her transgression: "no one knows the temptations of us poor girls in want. Gentlefolks can never understand it. . . . To be poor and to be honest, especially with young girls, is the hardest struggle of all. . . . I am ready to say again, that it was want, and nothing more, that made me transgress" (85). "Where a child is concerned," maternal love "is more important than any question of propriety," observes the 20th-century Canadian Gaskellian Edgar Wright (*Mrs Gaskell* 71). Immediately after Susan's remark on Lizzie's nearness to God comes her recognition that "to be checking her in" is "such a holy thing" ("LL" 19). Susan's view signifies that her compassion for Lizzie's maternal love is greater than her hate for Lizzie's sin. Susan is similar to Jesus Christ when he forgives "a woman taken in adultery" (John 8.3). He says to her accusers, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (John 8.7), and, finding they have all gone, says to the woman, "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more" (John 8.11). Into Susan's utterance is condensed Christ's teaching: "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven" (Luke 6.37).

Gaskell's second hint for Lizzie's heavenly redemption can be detected in the scene where Susan, looking at penitent Lizzie holding Nanny's body in her arms on the bed, is moved by the mother's humble but deep love for her child to pray aloud on and on "with streaming eyes," and cries aloud: "Oh, my God, my God, have mercy on her, and forgive, and comfort her" ("LL" 25). For, it is Jesus Christ's promise that the humble and earnest prayer to God is heard (John 15.16): "Have faith in God. . . . What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11.22-24). The third implication of Lizzie's heavenly deliverance is given through her mother's words of consolation and faith: if Lizzie's dead child has "gone to be an angel, it will speak to God for thee. . . . thou shalt have it again in Heaven; I know thou'lt strive to get there, for thy little Nanny's sake. . . . I'll tell thee God's promises to them that are penitent—only doan't be afeard." Then, Mrs Leigh repeats "every tender and merciful text" she can recollect ("LL" 30). The biblical texts concerning "God's promises" she reiterated here should probably be such verses as "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit" (Ps. 34.18), "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5.4), and "If we confess our sins, he [Jesus Christ] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1.9). The fourth device of Gaskell's for suggesting Lizzie's heavenly salvation is found in her narrator's identification of Lizzie with "the lost piece of silver—found once more" ("LL" 31). This phrase is an obvious echo of Christ's parable of a woman's delight at finding the lost piece of silver (Luke 15.8-9) whose import is to stress heavenly "joy over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15.10). Because of its association with Jesus's testimony that God's purpose for sending him to the earth is to "call . . . sinners to repentance"

(Mark 2.17), and of the repeated insertion of Lizzie's repentance into the text, this narratorial reference bears an implication that the erring prostitute will gladly be accepted by God.

The brief comparison between *Ruth* and "Lizzie Leigh" above concerning the narratorial description of fallen woman's redemption discloses that, while Gaskell incorporates her belief in the penitent sinner's salvation in Heaven in the old man's testimony in *Ruth*, she refrains from doing it, just hints at her belief through Susan, Anne, and the narrator, and thus leaves the final judgement to the reader's imagination and discretion, in "Lizzie Leigh." Its moral message might seem to be telegraphed loud and clear, but a careful analysis of the text reveals that no character, including the narrator, declares the confirmation of Lizzie's heavenly redemption. Here is concealed Gaskell's technical device of achieving her objective in a skilful way by abstaining from making too distinct an observation of her meaning, or moralization.

The above analysis of the introductory and conclusive sections of "Lizzie Leigh" highlights the permeation of such key features of the Christian doctrine God's Plan of Salvation as the potential of the human spirit for goodness, the temptation to sin, the depth of remorse, Christ as our saviour, divine compassion, and the eternity of human life, which correspond to the underlying pattern in the parable of the Prodigal Son—the arrogant sinner's restoration to salvation through repentance, love, and forgiveness. Indeed, "Lizzie Leigh" can be construed as the story of God's love for His children, i.e. us human beings, since its focal point is set on the love of Anne Leigh as "the interpreter of God's will" ("LL" 22) for her family—austere James, stern Will, tender Tom, pure Susan, ineffectual Mr Palmer, and especially repentant Lizzie—the embodiments of various types of human

beings whose good spirit within themselves are likely to be tempted to evilness, as is testified by the Apostle Paul, “There is none righteous, no not one” (Rom. 3.9), “all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3.19), and “all have sinned” (Rom. 3.23). Also, Anne’s love, or God’s charity, can be understood to be symbolically extended to the then society, since “Will and his father” are considered to symbolize “prudish” Victorian society (McBee, *Revoking* 49), as is Richard Bradshaw, Jemima’s patriarchal father in *Ruth*, who holds Will Leigh’s stern “attitude toward illegitimate children” (Nectoux 93), considered to represent the harshness of the “stringently ruled society” (Nectoux 95). A typical and traditional reading of Gaskell’s “fallen woman” fiction, whose focus is placed on the authorial intention of awakening the Victorian readers to their indifference to this “Great Social Evil” (McBee, *Revoking* 15) and thus to their Christian compassion to the thought of the sinners’ redemption, is summarized by McBee:

Through her use of characters who act as representations of patriarchal Victorian society, Gaskell places the blame of fallenness less upon the individual and more upon society’s silenced treatment of the subject. Specifically, she faults society’s polite euphemisms, silences, harsh words, and fictions as perpetuating fallenness in women. Furthermore, she illustrates that by breaking silences and by speaking kindly and truthfully, fallen women can be redeemed, allowing them to return to virtuous lives and afterlives. (*Revoking* 15)

Indeed, our allegorical interpretation of the story reveals the author’s belief in the redemption of a fallen woman in mortal as well as postmortal life, but her hesitancy in making its confirmation in the postmortal lives as well. Since centring on Gaskell’s descriptions of Christian morality, our allegorical interpretation also

keeps some interest in her artistic treatment of moralization, didacticism, sentimentalism, and melodrama, in “Lizzie Leigh,” which, because of these internal features, has been regarded as being “sombre in tone” (Uglow, *EG* 250) or “sombre to a painful degree” (A. B. Hopkins, *EG* 88) with the “serious theme” (Andrew Sanders, “Serializing” 47) of the fallen women problem, and criticized for “producing a sentimental and predictable conclusion” (Lansbury, *EG* 52) as well as for being “mawkish” (Marie Fitzwilliam, “Needle” 7) and “saccharine” (Stoneman, *EG* 28).

2.2. Anne Leigh’s Christian Compassion

The most conspicuous drawing in the story is given to Anne Leigh’s Christian compassion for her erring daughter.¹⁵ Since the disappearance of Lizzie,

¹⁵ There is a debate among critics as to who is the chief protagonist of “Lizzie Leigh.” Many critics points out that “Lizzie Leigh” is the story of Anne Leigh. For instance, “since we do not meet her [Lizzie] until we are near the end of the story, and even then she remains a shadowy or marginal figure,” Irene Wiltshire reads the story as “a family power struggle” between James and Will’s “patriarchal power” and Anne’s “free will,” for it “reveals the inner conflict of the main protagonist, who is not Lizzie, but Mrs Leigh” (*EG* 144-45). This view of the mother’s centrality in the tale is shared by some other critics. (For the similar reason to Wiltshire’s—“since the seduced girl” was “found by her mother, her subsequent life” has been “closed in the obscurity of retirement and mourning for the child of her sin, and all of this is conveyed in the last paragraphs”—, Arthur Pollard considers Gaskell’s tale “is really about the mother rather than the daughter” (*Mrs Gaskell* 87). Thompson asserts that, in Gaskell’s “version of the fallen woman story,” the emphasis is placed “not on what Lizzie has done, but on her [mother’s] suffering and, most importantly, her enduring love for her child” (“Faith” 24). Similarly, Logan’s interpretation of the story centres on Anne’s strong attachment to her erring daughter as a challenge to the stern morality of the Victorian society: “‘Lizzie Leigh’ is a story of female compassion and ‘woman’s mission to women’ in its most uncompromising sense—that of mother-love undeterred by patriarchal strictures” (“Unfit Subject” 32). The mother’s centrality in the tale is agreed with by Sally Michell: it “tells of a rural mother’s search through the streets of Manchester for her daughter who has gone wrong” (*Fallen Woman* 39). While focusing on Lizzie’s influence on her mother, George Watt also considers Anne Leigh as the central character of this tale: it is “really a story about the effect the daughter’s fall has on her mother” (*Fallen* 20). This aspect of two characters’ interaction is shared by Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, who regard “Lizzie Leigh” as the story of “a mother’s effort to recover her ‘fallen’ daughter” (*Victorian Publishing* 72).) In contrast, E. Holly Pike claims that it is the story of Susan Palmer, who brings up Lizzie’s illegitimate child Nanny under the circumstances of “Gaskell’s moral world” where the sinning mother’s “strong, instinctual motherliness” may be considered to disrupt “the traditional family unit”: “The real heroine of ‘Lizzie Leigh’ is not so much Lizzie Leigh as it is the young woman with whom Lizzie’s brother falls in love, and who is, coincidentally, raising Lizzie’s child as her ‘niece’” (*Family and Society* 49). Nectoux’s analysis of chief protagonists in “Lizzie Leigh” is unique as it acknowledges that the story is not merely about Susan, Anne, and Lizzie, but also about Will, “who learns to forgive by witnessing the forgiving nature of the woman he loves”; then the critic concludes that “Lizzie Leigh” is “not Lizzie’s story; it is rather the story of those related to her, those affected by her fall” (*Selected* 85). It might be a conventional understanding among literary critics that the frequency of characters’

“[m]any’s the time” (“LL” 7) she stands at the bedroom window to look “her heart out towards Manchester” (“LL” 7) “long and wistfully” (“LL” 4), where, she believes, her daughter should still be alive. In reply to her elder son Will’s doubt about it, Anne gives him a flat denial, saying “God will not let her die till I’ve seen her once again” (“LL” 8). Her reason may sound illogical to some readers, but it is not for pious Christians like her who believe earnest prayers should certainly be answered by God (Matt. 7.7-8; John 14.13-14). Since having “prayed and prayed just once again to see her sweet face, and tell her” that her mother has “forgiven her,” Anne can confirm that Lizzie “is not dead . . . with low earnestness” (“LL” 8). After moving to Manchester, she has “more spirit in her countenance than” she

appearances hardly provides a reliable cipher for narrative significance (Stanley Fish, “What Is Stylistics” 104-05, 110-113; Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 60). A humble attempt at the objective investigation, however, might help it spotlighted, and might give a hint for the diversity of readings shown above (High Craig, “Stylistic Analysis” 281), since Anne, Susan, and Will come higher in position than the eponymous heroine Lizzie in the frequency of appearance ranking (See Fig. 12). Besides, this statistical data, or a simple measurement of characters’ frequency of appearance, might contribute to some extent to settling the debate as to who is the central character, because a story is after all a collection of the words chosen by the author to convey his/her meaning. Actually, the title is not Gaskell’s but Charles Dickens’s, suggested when he received her draft for the initial issue of his new weekly periodical *Household Words*. After confessing in his 27 February 1850 letter to her that her story made him cry (Pilgrim 6: 49), Dickens proposes its title in his next letter to her dated 6 March 1850, “Don’t you think Lizzie Leigh a pretty name for it?” (Pilgrim 6: 56). There is no explanation for his reason for suggesting this title in this letter (except the word “pretty,” which suggests that he is partly keen on this title because it is euphonic and memorable), but presumably his intention should be to draw the reader’s attention to the fallen woman question because to deal with all social evils with “the sympathies and graces of imagination” (“A Preliminary Word,” *HW* 1) is the periodical’s principal policy: “All social evils, and all home affections and associations, I am particularly anxious to deal with, well” (Pilgrim 6: viii, 42). Actually, Dickens explains in his request for Gaskell’s contribution to his new periodical dated 31 January 1850 that “the general mind and purpose of the Journal” is “the raising up of those that are down, and the general improvement of our social condition” (Pilgrim 6: 23). (Dickens states his aim for *Household Words* in “A Preliminary Word” in the first number of the periodical dated 30 March 1850: “To show to all, that in all familiar things, even in those which are repellent on the surface, there is Romance enough, if we will find it out:—to teach the hardest workers at this whirling wheel of toil, that their lot is not necessarily a moody, brutal fact, excluded from the sympathies and graces of imagination: to bring the greater and the lesser in degree, together, upon that wide field, and mutually dispose them to a better acquaintance and a kinder understanding—is one main object of our *Household Words*” (*HW* 1: 1).) Wiltshire, however, considers the title inadequate, because “it directs the reader’s attention excessively to Lizzie’s trajectory, a reading which is unsatisfactory, for Lizzie is never fully realised as a character,” always remaining “a shadowy or marginal figure” (*EG* 144). The subsequent analysis of the Biblical elements in “Lizzie Leigh” should unearth the figurative meaning of the text—Anne’s love for her family as a reflection of God’s love for His spiritual children, i.e. us human beings, or to borrow Nectoux’s phrase, it is “not Lizzie’s story,” but “rather the story of those related to” (*Selected* 85) Anne Leigh.

did in Upclose Farm, “because now she had hope; of a sad enough kind . . . but still it was hope” (“LL” 9). Here is revealed the author’s meaning to make Anne Leigh the embodiment of the Apostle Paul’s teaching: “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three” (1 Cor. 13.13). Anne’s arduous search for Lizzie is filled with these three virtues as well. She performs “all her household duties” before stealing out from her house “in the evening,” and often comes back “before midnight” (“LL” 9). “Night after night” her search “was renewed, till days grew to weeks, and weeks to months,” and was continued “with never-wearing perseverance” (“LL” 9). The following citation affords a glimpse of the desperateness of her search in addition to her three virtues: “She sometimes took a few minutes’ rest on the door-steps, and sometimes (very seldom) covered her face and cried; but she could not afford to lose time and chances in this way; while her eyes were blinded with tears, the lost one might pass by unseen” (“LL” 10). On the very day after she moves to Manchester, Anne pays a visit to Lizzie’s old mistress to reproach her for having dismissed her daughter without telling it to her parents first; but, finding “she were in black and looked so sad” for having lost her husband, Anne cannot find in her heart to insist on discussing (“LL” 13; “Explanatory Notes” 245). When she knows through Susan Palmer that she has been keeping Lizzie’s child and will try to catch the child’s mother “the next time she comes with her little parcels of money,” Anne expresses her heartfelt gratitude to Susan by saying, “while I live, I’ll serve thee next to her,—she mun come first, thou know’st. God bless thee, lass” (“LL” 20). Anne’s love for Lizzie and her faith in God expressed in a “firm and dignified” manner in the dialogue with Will she has after her first interview with Susan are so strong as to persuade him to forgive his erring sister: the narrator describes her “as if the interpreter of God’s will” (“LL” 22).

Especially in the climax scene where Anne's prayer for meeting Lizzie again is answered for the first time in nearly four years,¹⁶ special emphasis is given to the holiness of her motherly love. The face of Lizzie sleeping on the bed of Susan's house has lost its former beauty and brightness with deep lines of care and want on the cheek; "even in her sleep"—the repetition of the phrase is an obvious sign of the author's meaning to stress the genuineness of Lizzie's repentance—"she bore the look of woe and despair" and "had forgotten how to smile" ("LL" 27). Notwithstanding, "all these marks of the sin and sorrow she had passed through only made her mother love her the more" ("LL" 27). To stress the strength of Anne's compassion for her pitiful daughter, the narrator continues, "Mrs Leigh sat down beside the bed, and . . . looked on and on, as if she could never be satisfied" ("LL" 27). The dialogue between mother and daughter which ensues Lizzie's waking signifies Anne's unfathomable affection for Lizzie and her unwavering faith in God. In answer to her penitent daughter's entreaty not to look at her, the mother expresses her view "in the most soothing tones" ("LL" 30). The essence conveyed in her utterance, "I never left off loving thee, Lizzie. I was always a-thinking of thee. . . . I'll do aught for thee; I'll live for thee" ("LL" 30), is in close association with God's love for His children, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3.16; 1 John 4.11), and the Apostle Paul's definition of charity,

¹⁶ It is three years ("LL" 3) since James Leigh sent Lizzie to Manchester to let her "learn to rough it" in spite of his wife's objection ("LL" 16), i.e. probably in December or so of 1833 as his death takes place on 25 December 1836; because the news of the "family shame" is known to the Leighs "more than two years" ("LL" 7) before the Christmas Day ("LL" 3), Lizzie's dismissal turns out to have occurred before December 1834; as Nanny is "two years old" ("LL" 10-11, 24) in the "autumn" ("LL" 10), or "blackberrying time" ("LL" 12), of 1837, her birthday falls on a day between the autumn of 1834 and that of 1835; accordingly, Lizzie's dismissal must have occurred before the summer of 1834 as it is natural to consider that she is fired before she gives birth to her baby; since a series of such crucial events as Nanny's death, Lizzie's appearance, and the reunions between mothers and daughters take place presumably in the autumn of 1837, it turns out that there is the span of nearly four years between the start of Lizzie's working in Manchester in December 1833 and her reunion with her mother in the autumn of 1837.

“Charity suffereth long. . . . Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth” (1 Cor.13.4-8). Anne’s message “Whate’er thou art or hast been, we’ll ne’er speak on’t” (“LL” 30) contains the same core as of Christ’s forgiveness given to the “woman taken in adultery” (John 8.3): “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” (John 8.11). Anne’s testimony “God has led me to thee. Blessed be His name. And God is good, too” (“LL” 30) is what can be afforded only by devout believers in God. As Logan observes, “Discouragement only makes her more determined until finally her faith pays off” (“Unfit Subject” 33). Anne is “no reader” of the Scriptures, but confesses that she has had consolation by memorizing those texts to comfort her, and “said them many a time a day to” herself (“LL” 30). She consoles Lizzie by reminding her that there is a hope for meeting her child in the next world should she be repentant: “thou shalt have it again in Heaven; I know thou’lt strive to get there, for thy little Nanny’s sake—and listen! I’ll tell thee God’s promises to them that are penitent” (“LL” 30). The divine promise is referred to in the Old Testament, for instance, by the penitent adulterer King David: “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (Ps. 34.18).

The fulfilment of Anne’s belief in Lizzie’s struggle to go to Heaven for Nanny’s sake is hinted at in the narratorial remark on the child’s little corpse: “the little, unconscious sacrifice, whose early calling-home had reclaimed her poor, wandering mother” (“LL” 31). The use of an illegitimate child as a means of changing its mother morally for the better is the device taken in *Ruth* as well, where Revd Benson, the protector of the repentant sinner Ruth, expresses his conviction that “the little innocent babe . . . may be God’s messenger to lead her back to Him” (*RU* 119). Gaskell’s unique treatment of what is regarded by the Victorian society

as “this disgrace—the badge of her shame” (*RU* 119) is noticed by Ellis H. Chadwick, who observes “Mrs. Gaskell always advocated the redeeming influence of a little child” (181); so is it by Enid L. Duthie, who points out “the motif of the child as an agent of conciliation” (*Themes* 73). Indeed, Nanny is intended to function as a link connecting character to character. For instance, after Anne tells her erring daughter’s past to Susan at her first visit to the school teacher’s house, Lizzie’s mother begins to cry “aloud” in emotion, and her listener weeps too in sympathy; the little child, then, looks “up into their faces, and, catching their sorrow,” begins “to whimper and wail” (“LL” 16-17). The two-year-old (“LL” 11) girl is described as having a kind and pure heart to feel their sadness. Also, in the same interview, Susan comforts her visitor with her belief that Nanny should become a means to connect Will to his sinning sister of whom he feels ashamed: “I am sure he could not help loving Nanny. . . . don’t you think she’d win his heart if he knew she was his niece, and perhaps bring him to think kindly on his sister?” (“LL” 19).

The meaning of the death of “Lizzie’s badge of shame” (Logan, “Unfit Subject5” 33; ---, *Fallenness* 80) has long been a topic of critics’ concern. Edgar Wright states that Nanny’s “accidental death” is arranged “in order to side-step any real solution” to the sensitive problem of how to treat an illegitimate child in the strict Victorian morality (*Mrs Gaskell* 70). Logan considers it as “the sort of retribution exacted by an unrelenting moral code” (*Fallenness* 80; ---, “Unfit Subject” 33), while Morris regards it as “not simply punishment of Lizzie for her sin,” but also as condemnation against “the masculine, judgemental, selfish, and unsympathetic stance” (“Ready” 50) since it is caused by Mr Palmer’s selfishness (Homans, *Bearing the Word* 232; Morse, “Stitching” 40). A positive view of Nanny’s death is given by some critics. For example, it is “necessary to bring

mother and daughter together again” (Homans, *Bearing* 232), and provides the “incentive for the pursuit of” Lizzie’s salvation (Thompson, “Faith” 24) as well as “a way of sacrificially paving the path back to society for her *fallen* mother” (Fitzwilliam, “The Politics” 23). Morris observes, “through the tragedy of the child’s death, which leads to her reunion with her own mother, Lizzie has hope restored” (“Ready” 50). A Christian reading of the text finds the positive meaning hidden in this device.

Anne Leigh’s virtue is not limited to her compassion for her erring daughter. Her Christian integrity is implied even in such a small scene where she is nearly on the verge of uttering to Susan the words of accusation for her dead husband of his sternness against their daughter, but stops uttering them after all: “I’ll not speak again the dead; but if her father would but ha’ letten me—but he were one who had no notion—no, I’ll not say that; best say nought. He forgave her on his death-bed” (“LL” 17). The missing words Anne fails to articulate in her pauses should be something like “search for Lizzie” and “of allowing me to do it.” If James Leigh had given Anne permission to look for their missing daughter or forgiven her earlier, Lizzie could have avoided falling into serious sin, or prostitution, which is what she meant to say in her utterance. A similar view of the meaning of her pauses in the quotation above is expressed by Margaret Homans: “Anne points out . . . that the harm to Lizzie after her fall could have been mitigated if only James had not forbidden Anne to seek her out in Manchester right away” (*Bearing* 230). In summary, the key point of Anne’s utterance above is that she refrains from judging her husband, and this action mirrors her faith in Christ’s teaching: “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven” (Luke 6.37).

Regarding Anne's role as a saviour, Thompson writes, without "the help of her family," especially of her mother, "Lizzie might easily die of starvation or disease" ("Faith" 23). Wiltshire makes a similar comment on her role: "Without her mother's persistence, Lizzie would never have been found, let alone morally reclaimed and restored to her native place" (*EG* 153). Anne Leigh is indeed depicted as the epitome of God's love for human beings.

2.3. Will Leigh's Goodness

Although regarded as a spokesperson of Victorian stern patriarchal morality by critics (McBee, *Revoking* 55; Thompson, "Faith" 23; Fitzwilliam, "The Politics" 15-16, 18; Logan, "Unfit Subject" 33), actually Will is drawn as having tender heart, or the good spirit, from the beginning of the story to the end, or as "not entirely without virtue" (Thompson, "Faith" 23). He feels sympathy with "his father's stern anger" against Lizzie, but thinks him "something hard" when he forbids "his weeping, heart-broken wife to go and try to find her poor, sinning child" and declares that "henceforth they would have no daughter; that she should be as one dead, and her name never more be named at market or at meal time, in blessing or in prayer" ("LL" 7). Will becomes so angry with his sister as to grind "his teeth together" and feel as if he could strike "her down in her shame," but, moved by his mother's strong conviction that she is "not dead," he finally agrees to move to Manchester simply from his sympathy towards his mother ("LL" 8). Soon after making this concession, he shows his prudence as well in his suggestion to refrain from telling Tom the reason for their one-year stay at the industrial city ("LL" 9), as it involves "the family shame" ("LL" 7) which is too delicate a problem for his 10-year old brother to be exposed to. Every night Anne is in search for Lizzie, Will, although "without having sympathy with her," does "his duty towards her as well

as” he can (“LL” 9). The narratorial description of Will, who, “for his father’s sake,” regards “old age with tenderness, even when” they are “degraded and removed from the stern virtues which dignified that father” (“LL” 10), foreshadows Will’s subsequent regard for his “degraded” and dishonourable sister “with tenderness.” The significance of Will’s “human sympathy” and “respect for the old age” in view of the plot development is spotlighted by Wiltshire, who claims, “It is this act of kindness on the part of Will that sets in motion the chain of events which culminates in the rescue of Lizzie, and the restoration of the lost daughter to her family” (*EG* 155). Will, who suffers from painful conflict between his love for Susan and his resolution to give her up, becomes irritated with “her mother for her untiring patience in seeking for” his missing sister, and speaks sharply to her; soon after receiving “sad deprecatory answers,” however, he comes to “reproach himself” for his impatience with his own mother (“LL” 12). In his talk with Anne, who dares to command him to forgive his erring sister in a dignified manner “as if the interpreter of God’s will,” Will becomes humble enough to bend his head “as if in reverence at her words,” and makes a promise that he will “never say a casting-up word to her [Lizzie’s] about her sin, but be tender and helpful” towards his sister (“LL” 22). In answer to Susan’s persuasion to be lenient towards his sister, Will says, “I will do what is right and fitting. . . . I’m not cruel and hard; for if I had been, I should na’ have grieved as I have done” (“LL” 29). The above trace of Will’s change—a penitent sinner’s restoration to good—is a partial reflection of the underlying pattern of the parable of the Prodigal Son. It also indicates that even the stern Will is a child of God (a reflection of one of the key concepts of the Plan of Salvation), which is acknowledged by Morse, who observes that “The obedience

Will gives to his mother defines his moral education in the true Christian spirit, embodied by the maternal spirit in this narrative” (“Stitching” 39).

2.4. Susan Palmer’s Goodness

Susan Palmer functions as an angel who helps Christ’s work. She is “good and pure as the angels in heaven, yet, like them, full of hope and mercy, and one who, like them, will rejoice over her as repents” (“LL” 22; emphasis added) and has “clear, sweet, angel-eyes” (“LL” 24; emphasis added). The Scriptures indicate that angels are “spiritual beings created by God to serve Him,” and “function as God’s messengers” (Pat Robertson, “Angels”; Ps. 19.11; Matt. 1.20, 2.13; Luke 1.26-30; Heb.1.14). God’s use of Susan as such is hinted at when she demonstrates her compassion towards Lizzie, who becomes “so fierce, so mad, so haggard” with despair immediately after sensing the death of her child: “the holy God had put courage into her heart, and her pure arms were round that guilty, wretched creature” (“LL” 24; emphasis added). Will describes her to his mother as “so gentle and so good . . . downright holy” and has never known “a touch of sin” (“LL” 14). Her angelic goodness and purity are explained to Anne by her neighbouring woman: she has “a smile for gladdening” others’ heart, is such a person as “a stranger would stop in the street to ask help from if he needed it” and as all “the little child creeps as close as they can to her,” is “never . . . set up [conceited],” “just one to come quietly in, and do the very thing most wanted; little things, maybe, that any one could do, but that few would think on, for another,” and “in nobody’s way” (“LL” 15). Susan’s tender-heartedness is spotlighted in the touching scene where, overpowered by the genuine affection of the repentant mother who holds her dead child in her arms even “for a little while,” Susan prays to God for mercy, forgiveness, and comfort for Lizzie (“LL” 25); Susan is sensitive enough to feel the

depth of Lizzie's love for Nanny and of her shame, and humble enough to acknowledge that what she knows about the family shame is "all but her sufferings" ("LL" 28). The narrator calls Susan "holy and pure" in the scene of her interview with Will where she encourages him to accept his lost but found sister ("LL" 28). In reply to his "low and stern" answer that Lizzie deserves all her sufferings, Susan insists, "In the eye of God, perhaps she does. He is the judge; we are not" ("LL" 28), which is the echo of Christ's teachings, "Judge not" (Matt. 7.1; Luke 6.37) and "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12.19). Susan's testimony to the "morally upright" (Wiltshire, *EG* 155) Will, "Goodness is not goodness unless there is mercy and tenderness with it" ("LL" 29), is similar in purport to Margaret Hale the heroine's testimony to the stern industrialist John Thornton when she says, "God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent" (*NS* 122). Both convey the summary of all Scriptural commandments, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Lev. 19.18; Matt. 19.19; Matt. 22.39; Mark 12.31; Luke 10.27; Rom. 13.9; Gal. 5.14; Jas. 2.8). Susan's kindness of bringing up an unknown baby is reflected later in Revd Benson's in *Ruth*. The minister takes care of an unknown 16-year-old (*RU* 51, 198) girl Ruth.

Susan's angelic goodness is an object of critics' attention. She is "the shining example of purity and morality" (Morris, "Ready" 47), "the perfect, pure, morally infallible exemplary character. . . . the story's paragon of purity and morality (Morris, "Ready" 48), "the silently present angel of the house" (Fitzwilliam, "The Politics" 20), the embodiment of "the self-sacrifice of Christ's example" (Morse, "Stitching" 38), and "the epitome of Christian forgiveness" (Nectoux 89). Even so good a character as Susan is depicted as imperfect: she is criticized by her father for her slowness to notice potential danger—"I had not my wits about me, father

says" ("LL" 17). Anne becomes plain-spoken to disparage Susan at their first meeting: "Every one says you're very good, and that the Lord has kepted you from falling from his ways; but maybe you've never yet been tried and tempted as some is" ("LL" 16). A tinge of jealousy for Susan may obviously be incorporated in this utterance of Anne, whose own good daughter has been tried and tempted to sin, but her deprecation is proper in a sense as Susan's lack of experience or ignorance of the world can indeed cause some weakness of character in the secular world. The insertion of these two short references to Susan's imperfectness is probably Gaskell's device to give her too good character a realistic tint.

2.5. Lizzie Leigh's Goodness

Even Lizzie, whose love for her daughter Nanny has forced her into sinful life, is depicted as a child of God who is endowed with goodness in the spirit. In addition, her life of repentance is in close association with the Prodigal Son's life of repentance. The depth of her remorse is emphasized throughout the storyline. For instance, when she asks Susan if she can have her dead child in her arms for a little while, and apologizes to her for the rude words carelessly uttered with the shock of knowing Nanny's death, Lizzie articulates the humble words of repentance and regret: "I am not worthy to touch her, I am so wicked. I have spoken to you as I never should have spoken" ("LL" 25). When Anne sees her missing daughter for the first time in nearly four years lying on the bed of Susan's house, highlighted is the contrast between the former "bright, gay, buoyant, and undimmed" ("LL" 27) Lizzie and the present "guilty, wretched" ("LL" 24) Lizzie. The eponymous heroine's bitter remorse, or the sign of her spirit's inborn goodness, is delineated in the narrator's explanation of her change: "This Lizzie was old before her time; her beauty was gone; deep lines of care, and, alas! of want (or thus the

mother imagined) were printed on the cheek, so round, and fair, and smooth, when last she gladdened her mother's eyes. Even in her sleep she bore the look of woe and despair which was the prevalent expression of her face by day; even in her sleep she had forgotten how to smile" ("LL" 22; emphasis added). The repetition of the phrase "even in her sleep" denotes the hidden authorial meaning of stressing the truth of Lizzie's penitence, the acuteness of her untold agony, and the inborn purity of her spirit. Lizzie's response to her mother made immediately after awakening also indicates the truth of her repentance: "Lizzie cried out in a piercing voice of agony,—'Mother, don't look at me! I have been so wicked!' and instantly she hid her face, and grovelled among the bedclothes" ("LL" 29). In reply to her mother's words of comfort that if Nanny has "gone to be an angel, it will speak to God for" her, Lizzie says, "Could she speak! Oh, if God—if I might but have heard her little voice! Mother, I used to dream of it" ("LL" 30). Lizzie's utterance "Could she speak!" can be construed as implying two meanings at least. The first is a positive meaning that she would be very happy if Nanny could speak to God for her redemption; the second is a negative meaning that she wonders if her daughter could really speak to God for it. Whichever may be Lizzie's true meaning, the humble penitence of the erring mother is contained in her utterance as it denotes her self-negation that she is disqualified to have such a blessing as her innocent daughter's help. Her humble penitence can also be detected from her earnest wish for hearing her child's voice. No doubt she has had no such chance for as long as "two years" ("LL" 24) since she committed her to Susan's care soon after she was born ("LL" 17). Her confession of dreaming of hearing Nanny's voice is another sign of the sincerity of her repentance since it betokens she has been committed to her self-accusation that she is "not worthy to touch her" as being "so

wicked” (“LL” 25). Lizzie’s depth of regret is in close association with the Prodigal Son’s in which the same sense of self-denial is incorporated: “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son” (Luke 15.21, 18-19; emphasis added)—indeed, the Prodigal Son himself commits a sin of sexual immorality (Luke 15.30). This is one of the significant pieces of evidence to verify the validity of our interpretation of “Lizzie Leigh” as a reflection of Christ’s parable. She still wonders if she is permitted to see Nanny again in the next world, saying “if I strive very hard and God is very merciful, and I go to heaven, I shall not know her—I shall not know my own again—she will shun me as a stranger, and cling to Susan Palmer and to you” (“LL” 30). Her “earnestness of speech” (“LL” 30) is a reflection of her seriousness in remorse because of the same reason as above, i.e. her shame is too deep for her to allow herself to make an appearance in front of her beloved daughter. Anne’s remark in this climactic scene, “Lizzie. Thou hast not forgot thy Bible, I’ll be bound, for thou wert always a scholar” (“LL” 30), uncovers the fact of Lizzie’s constant reading of Scriptures at her home and her fundamental seriousness in character, which are another badge of the fallen woman being a spirit child of God.

Thompson is right when she claims, “Gaskell’s is emphatically a mother’s-eye view of the fallen woman. The emphasis is not on what Lizzie has done, but on her suffering and, most importantly, her enduring love for her child” (“Faith” 24), because what is brought to light in parallel with Lizzie’s depth of repentance in the tale is her motherly love for Nanny. Gaskell’s subtle hint for mother’s “enduring love” for child is embedded in a small episode in which one of the frocks that Lizzie dropped into Susan’s arms together with the baby is “made out of a gown” that Anne and Lizzie bought together in Rochdale (“LL” 18). It implies that Anne’s gift

for Lizzie has become Lizzie's gift for Nanny—a sequence of mother's love for daughter. To note in this scene of Lizzie's entrusting her baby to Susan is the fallen woman's never-ending love for her baby kept even in dire straits. When she offers the bundle to Susan, she turns her face to one side to hide it from the kind girl; this small gesture of hiding her shame is a token of guilty conscience, a sign of her spirit's goodness. The packet which contains clothes is "little," and the contents are "very few"; the baby's clothes are "made out of its mother's gowns, for they were large patterns to buy for a baby" ("LL" 17). This narratorial description implies Lizzie's poverty and the best of her maternal affection she tries to give her baby even in such a wretched plight—another sign of the goodness of her spirit.

Morse reads that Lizzie's "essential purity" is suggested in the name of her mother Anne, which is the same as the name of Virgin Mary's mother according to apocryphal Christian tradition ("Saints Anne and Joachim," *Britannica*): "The fact that Lizzie's mother and Lizzie's child bear the name of a perfect mother in Christian theology, the mother of the Virgin Mary, perhaps suggests the essential purity of Lizzie herself" ("Stitching" 37). Lizzie's redemption is suggested by her deep repentance and, according to Morse, by her resemblance to Maria, Jesus Christ's mother: "Lizzie's embrace of the dead child recalls . . . the Pietà, the final embrace of Mother and Child" ("Stitching" 41). Nectoux's remark about Esther, the fallen woman in *Mary Barton*—"True, Esther has fallen, but her spiritual goodness remains. Her regrettable choices and subsequent lifestyle are sinful; yet, her nature remains virtuous, worthy of repentance and salvation" (*Selected* 88)—is applicable to Lizzie as it is. Morris asserts, "it is wrong to judge and censure other people, that Lizzie does in fact have the potential to overcome her sin"

("Ready" 41). These critics' reading of the fallen woman's integrity endorses our interpretation of Lizzie as the spirit child of God.

2.6. Mr Palmer's Goodness

There appears no evil character in "Lizzie Leigh." This is meaningful in view of (a) the Plan of Salvation which endorses the fundamental goodness of the human spirit, (b) Gaskell's conformity with the Christian creed, and (c) the prevalence of this tendency in most of her works. Even Henry Bellingham or Mr Donne, the seducer of the eponymous heroine Ruth Hilton, is depicted as having the good spirit. When no one approaches him in fear of his infectious fever at a hospital, one "faithful" servant will "not leave his master" who "saved his life as a child, and afterwards put him in the stables at Bellingham Hall, where he learnt all that he knew" (*RU* 443). Even Harry Carson, the eponymous heroine Mary Barton's "masculine flirt" lover (*MB* 239), is a spirit child of God. The assassinated young mill owner is "a good, kind brother" for his sister Sophy (*MB* 239), and a son "so full of fun" and always having "something new to amuse" his family with (*MB* 248). Similarly, even the stern father of rigid morality James Leigh is described as having the good spirit. In addition to his paternal affection towards his erring daughter discussed above, he manifests his love for his family by bequeathing Upclose Farm "to his faithful wife, Anne Leigh, for her life time; and afterwards, to his son William"; his savings are "to accumulate for Thomas" his younger son ("LL" 5). These legacies provide resources for Anne to live in Manchester to look for Lizzie, for Will to start his married life ("LL" 31), and for Tom to "have good schooling"

in Manchester, along with his brother's financial support ("LL" 8), and later to become "a school-master in Rochdale" ("LL" 31).¹⁷

Susan's father Mr Palmer is described as a person with many weak points. He is introduced to the story as being aimless presumably because of the bankruptcy in his former "genteel line of business" ("LL" 10-11); he shows his anger to Susan, who has brought an unknown mother's baby home, telling her that he will "take it to the workhouse" ("LL" 17); after all, however, he agrees to let her keep the baby if she earns "enough for him to have his comforts" ("LL" 17-18); knowing that the mother thrusts in a little parcel of money under the door of his house every now and then for her baby, he wants "to set the policeman to watch" her ("LL" 19); on the night of Nanny's accidental fall from stairs, he comes back "in his unusually intoxicated state," and uselessly sleeps on the settle, "worse than useless if awake" ("LL" 23); in the next morning, he shows no "scruple to reproach" Susan "with being the cause of little Nanny's death," and wounds her even more by saying insensitive words of comfort that "it was as well the child was dead; it was none of theirs, and why should they be troubled with it?" ("LL" 27). As

¹⁷ Samuel Orme, the Leighs' old friend and the executor of James's will, is also a man of good spirit. In his negotiation with Anne about letting her farm to his son-in-law Tom Higginbotham, Samuel Orme is discreet enough to think it "not . . . right" to drive a bargain on the funeral day as she is likely "'dazed' by her husband's death"; he promises the two Leigh boys that he shall refrain from telling the transaction to his daughter's husband as he may "set his heart upon" the farm, and advises them to have an ample talk "with their mother" before making a final decision as he will "wait a day or two" ("LL" 6-7). That the two boys have been brought up in the healthy home environment of moral integrity is hinted at in the narratorial remark that the brothers are "dearly fond of each other" ("LL" 5). Even unnamed minor characters are described as having the good spirit as children of God. On the day of James's death, "the kind-hearted neighbours" call at Upclose Farm "on their way from church to sympathise and condole" ("LL" 3). On his funeral day, many neighbours "accompanied the body to the grave" on the white earth in "the great white flakes which came slowly down . . . the boding forerunners of a heavy storm" ("LL" 5). The woman to whom Anne inquires the street number of Susan Palmer's house in No. 9 Crown Street ("LL" 24) is kind enough to ask her to wait until the closing hour of Susan's school at her house ("LL" 15). The doctor whom Susan calls at night to ask for treatment for the dying Nanny shows the goodness of his spirit by answering, "I'll be there directly" ("LL" 24). When Susan has to summon a little neighbour to inform Will Leigh that his mother is at her house, her messenger is "willing" ("LL" 28).

James Leigh demonstrated his “stern virtues” (“LL” 10) in repudiating his sinning daughter, “Susan’s father has always objected to Nanny’s presence” (Homans, *Bearing* 230). In these depictions of ineffectual Mr Palmer, Aina Rubenius sees Gaskell’s implication of attack on a “father’s selfishness and absurd pretensions to authority” (95-96). Even for such an aimless, stern, useless, selfish, and insensitive drunkard, Anne’s love is hinted at by the author in the constructional symmetry between the Leighs and the Palmers. If Lizzie is Anne’s “sinning child” (“LL” 7), Mr Palmer is Susan’s “erring father” (“LL” 23). If Lizzie is “the family shame” (“LL” 7), so is Susan’s father (“LL” 10, 23). Accordingly, if Lizzie is forgiven, so should be Mr Palmer, who becomes Anne’s relative in consequence of her son’s marriage to his daughter. Even such a weak-willed Mr Palmer is depicted as having good spirit within himself—the evidence of his being a child of God: he has kind-hearted consideration for his daughter “for whose respect he cared even in his half-intoxicated state, or whose feelings he feared to grieve” (“LL” 10).

2.7. Conclusion

We have analysed “Lizzie Leigh” mainly in terms of the following four perspectives: (a) first, the pattern of God’s attempt to save human beings—sinning, repentance, divine compassion, and salvation—forms the backbone of the plot, i.e. not only of the life of Lizzie but also of the lives of Will and James, (b) second, the facilitators of this attempt, or the presenters of Christian compassion, are Anne and Susan, (c) third, the key elements to promote this pattern which signifies God’s plan of saving human beings—the dual constituents of a human being, the potential of the spirit for goodness, Christ as our Saviour, and the hope for eternal life—are scattered over the story, and accordingly, (d) fourth, the tale can be construed as Gaskell’s interpretation of Jesus Christ’s parable of the Prodigal Son.

One of the essential purports of Jesus Christ's parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15.11-32) is the father's joy over the return of his sinning but repentant son. Luke the Apostle records Christ's three parables in Chapter 15 of his Gospel, beginning with the Pharisees and scribes' critical murmur against Jesus's receiving and eating with "publicans [tax collectors] and sinners" (Luke. 15.1-2). He first tells the murmurers the parable of the lost sheep to stress the owner's joy of finding it, and explains his meaning: "likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke 15.7). Jesus's second parable about a woman's delight at finding the lost piece of silver is related to the same effect: "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15.10). Jesus then introduces the parable of the Prodigal Son. There is no explanation about his meaning of the third parable as in the above two, but it is suggested in the father's repetition of the words of delight at his son's return: "my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (Luke 15.24, 32). Accordingly, all three parables signify God's joy of finding repentant sinners and also God's unfathomable love for His penitent children. Indeed, Christ confesses his purpose of coming to the earth is "not to call righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mark 2.17).

References to all of these three parables are inserted into "Lizzie Leigh." In the closing paragraph, the narrator concludes the story by referring to the second parable to express Anne's joy: "Mrs Leigh is quiet and happy. Lizzie is, to her eyes, something precious—as the lost piece of silver—found once more" ("LL" 31; emphasis added). Another reference to the second parable is made in Anne's description of Susan, who is "good and pure as the angels in heaven, yet, like them, full

of hope and mercy, and one who, like them, will rejoice over her as repents" ("LL" 22; emphasis added). The narratorial remark on the third parable, the Prodigal Son, is inserted most often. It is the chapter of "the Prodigal Son" which, in reply to Will's suggestion to let Tom read the Bible, Anne makes a request for reading on the Christmas night of her husband's death ("LL" 4). After Tom's reading is ended, Anne begins to read the chapter to herself: "most of all she paused and brightened over the father's tender reception of the repentant prodigal" ("LL" 5; emphasis added). The reference to the parable appears in Anne's articulation to Will of her determination to look for Lizzie, who "may be perishing for hunger, like the poor lad in the parable" ("LL" 7; emphasis added). Anne alludes to the phrase in the Luke's gospel, "who was lost and is found," when she dares to command her stern son to be kind towards Lizzie, "who was lost and is found," because she is confident that God is on her side sister ("LL" 22). This phrase is linked to all three parables (the lost sheep, the piece of silver, and the prodigal son) rather than only to the third, it appears in a slightly varied form in all of them: "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost" (Luke 15.6; emphasis added), "Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost" (Luke 15.9; emphasis added), "my son . . . was lost, and is found" (Luke 15.24; emphasis added), and also "thy brother . . . was lost, and is found" (Luke 15.32; emphasis added). The reference to Chapter 15 of Luke's gospel is also found in Anne's call of Lizzie as "the lost one" ("LL" 10; emphasis added) and the narrator's description of her as her mother's "lost child" ("LL" 27; emphasis added). Furthermore, the narrator's use of "sinner" reminds us of its association with the phrase in the Luke's gospel: "one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15.7, 10; emphasis added). Anne calls her beloved daughter "the poor sinner" ("LL" 14), "the sinner" ("LL" 21), and "the

wandering sinner” (“LL” 22). The second “sinner” appears when Anne tells Will her impression of Susan: “She’s not one to judge and scorn the sinner” (“LL” 21; emphasis added). This impression is followed by the narratorial explanation about the reason for Anne’s praise of her son’s love, “She’s too deep read in her New Testament for that” (“LL” 21; emphasis added), which could be an authorial device for hinting at Susan’s reading Chapter 15 of Luke’s gospel. Thus, references to the three biblical parables signifying God’s joy over the return of contrite sinners are scattered over the storyline as if to suggest the author’s meaning of making them form the backbone of “Lizzie Leigh,” and imply the tale’s core theme.

In conclusion, as discussed above, God’s joy over the return of His repentant children, or the biblical parable of the Prodigal, is the structural as well as thematic backbone of “Lizzie Leigh,” and it is conveyed principally through Anne Leigh’s Christ-like compassion for her erring daughter who is in deep remorse about her moral impurity. Furthermore, the repeated references to the goodness of characters’ spirits,¹⁸ to the hope for everlasting life,¹⁹ and to God’s mercy for the

¹⁸ The Christian concept of the potential goodness of the spirit explains the Unitarians’ objection to the Calvinist doctrine of original sin somewhat, because they are more likely to focus on human beings’ “original virtue” implicit in the biblical story of the creation of the earth (Chryssides 40). Chryssides continues, while “many mainstream Christians affirm the doctrine of original sin,” Unitarians consider that “Adam and Eve are not . . . understood as ‘totally depraved,’ but as having the potential for good, and in the same way men and women today have the propensity for good as well as evil” (40). Unitarians understand that “Men and women have sufficient good within themselves to be able to hear an ethic of love and justice and to put it into practice” (Chryssides 41), and hence maintain faith in “the power of reason” and “the natural goodness of man” (Lansbury, *Social Crisis* 13). There is this Unitarian belief in the spiritual goodness behind the narratorial insertion of the reference to characters’ goodness into the text.

¹⁹ A glimpse of Anne Leigh’s belief in the next world is offered in her regret at the employer’s merciless dismissal of her erring daughter Lizzie which is condensed in her explanation to her elder son Will: “The master would have her turned away at a day’s warning (he’s gone to t’ other place; I hope he’ll meet wi’ more mercy there than he showed our Lizzie . . .)” (“LL” 13; emphasis added). Anne’s belief in the other world is expressed also when she praises Susan’s goodness to Will: Susan is so “good and pure as the angels in heaven” (“LL” 22; emphasis added; Gen. 28.12, Luke 1.19, 26-27) that “I’ll not misdoubt but that thy heart will give thanks as mine did, afore God and His angels, for her great goodness” (“LL” 21). Another instance of Anne’s belief in the eternal life is found in the consolation she gives Lizzie when they meet for the first time nearly in four years. She promises to her that if her dead baby Nanny has “gone to be an angel, it will speak to God for” her, and that she shall “have it again in heaven”; Anne knows that Lizzie will “strive to get there” for her little Nancy’s sake, and continues to comfort her with her words of

repentant signify that the principal Christian doctrine God's Plan of Salvation becomes the backbone of this story as well. Considering the main focus is placed on Anne's Christ-like love for other main characters—strict moralist James, tender moralist Will, angelic Susan, her father Mr Palmer, penitent Lizzie, and innocent Nanny, or the embodiments of various types of human beings—, the story contains an allegorical meaning to stress God's enduring love to us human beings. As for Gaskell's moralization or didacticism, it may appear more conspicuous in "Lizzie Leigh" than in the other stories featuring the prodigal such as "The Crooked Branch" and "Crowley Castle"; however, her moral messages are conveyed in so close conjunction with her religious faith as to fit naturally into the plot flow. Some are straight as in Susan's emotional but sincere appeal to Will, "Goodness is not goodness unless there is mercy and tenderness with it" ("LL" 29); others are subtle as in the narratorial remark on Anne's selfless and divine charity for Lizzie, "all these marks of the sin and sorrow she had passed through only made her mother love her the more" ("LL" 27).

encouragement: "I'll tell thee God's promises to them that are penitent [Acts 3.19, for instance]—only doan't be afeard" ("LL" 30; emphasis added). The following quotation from Webb's argument on Gaskell's "strong sympathy for those who suffered" includes the critic's recognition of the novelist's belief in the next world: "Elizabeth Gaskell had no doubt that in the life hereafter (and not in Hell-fire), John Barton, and all of us, would attain final salvation" ("The Gaskells" 165). Gaskell's belief in God's Plan of Salvation is based on the Unitarian belief in the doctrine which is voiced in her husband's sermon: "the plan of Divine Providence . . . for our good, has placed us under a severe and painful system of discipline," as preparation for "a new and higher condition of being" (Webb, "The Gaskells" 164). In closing the talk she had as "the interpreter of God's will" with her elder son Will, Anne asks him to treat Lizzie with "compassion" (Luke 15.20) as the father of the prodigal son does: "I may be dead and gone,—but, all the same,—thou wilt take home the wandering sinner, and heal up her sorrows, and lead her to her Father's house." ("LL" 22). The capitalized first letter "F" signifies the symbolic meaning of God's house in the next world. Jesus Christ says to his disciples, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14.2). Accordingly, Anne's entreaty to Will to lead his penitent sister to her Father's house after her own death could be another reflection of her belief in the eternity of our life as well as of her compassion towards her erring daughter.

CHAPTER 3 “THE CROOKED BRANCH”: GOOD VS EVIL

3.1. Introduction

The second prodigal story among Gaskell’s shorter fiction, “The Crooked Branch,” describes the stark contrast between the Christian integrity of the Huntroyd family and the Satanic immorality of the prodigal Benjamin (See Fig. 10 for character correlation). The focus is placed on the dramatic contrast between the former’s Godly love for the latter and the latter’s devilish self-centredness towards the former. In comparison with the prodigal in the first story “Lizzie Leigh,” where implications of Lizzie’s repentance and earthly salvation are scattered over the text, “The Crooked Branch” contains few hints for the prodigal’s repentance and salvation. Gaskell’s meaning for this device presumably lies in intimating the great love of God for the sinful human beings through the repeated emphasis of the Huntroyd family’s consideration and affection for the son. There seem to be no substantial errors in the righteous Huntroyds’ morality while there are serious errors in villainous Benjamin’s.

In order to examine the validity of this interpretation, the subsequent argument centres on the contrast between the three virtuous characters—Nathan Huntroyd the father, Hester Huntroyd the mother, and Bessy Rose the cousin and fiancée—and the one villainous character Benjamin Huntroyd the prodigal.²⁰ Section 3.2. analyses Nathan’s paternal affection and justice for his son Benjamin. Section 3.3. examines Hester’s maternal devotion to her only child. Section 3.4. investigates Bessy’s tender-hearted integrity for her fiancé and his parents. The

²⁰ For a deeper understanding of the plot, a chronology for the tale is created. See **Table 3** in Appendices for details.

evilness of the only wicked character among the four main characters, Benjamin, is the main topic of discussion in Section 3.5. The summary of the arguments above, together with a brief analysis of the meaning of the narrator's closing remark, is given in the conclusive Section 3.6.

3.2. Nathan Huntroyd's Christianity

Some critics point out that Nathan's indulgence is one of the crucial causes for his son's "filial callousness" (Easson, *EG* 213). This section argues Nathan, "naturally kind-hearted and neighbourly" ("CB" 253), is not so indulgent a father as has been regarded, since he always tries to choose righteous and affectionate actions in accordance with the Christian principles.

3.2.1. Nathan's Indulgence

Easson states that the power in the climactic scene of the court trial lies in "the unspoken recognition by Nathan and his wife Hester that they bear responsibility, however unintended, for their son's crookedness" (*EG* 213). Bacigalupo observes, "Nathan must share the blame for his son's moral downfall. In acknowledging this responsibility, Nathan elucidates the theme of the narrative: 'I mun needs make my bairn a gentleman; and we mun pay for it'" (124). Elisabeth Jay makes a comment to the similar effect: "'The Crooked Branch' is about bad parenting" ("Reports" 181). Nectoux asserts, "Gaskell's story shows that a strong belief in unconditional forgiveness can sometimes be quite burdensome and complicated. . . . If forgiveness is given too freely or too easily, it can be dangerous. Rationality must accompany the action" (*Selected* 70; Saracino, "Interpreting" 114-15). The most powerful advocate of this view would be Styler, who interprets the sinful Benjamin as "entirely the product of his upbringing" ("The Problem" 35):

The tragedy of 'The Crooked Branch' is that the family do not realise that they have created the monster which comes back to ravage them. . . . It is in this respect that Benjamin's parents fail, since while undoubtedly loving and affectionate, their indulgence towards their son creates his monstrous character. They lack rational principles to guide their training of his nature, and thereby fail to develop in him a social conscience. ("The Problem" 35)

Indeed, Nathan expresses his repentance, admitting he himself is responsible for his son's weak morality, on the night when he hears Benjamin make a proposition to go to London "for a year or two" after "his apprenticeship was ended."

Poor Farmer Huntroyd was beginning to repent of his ambition of making his son Benjamin a gentleman. But it was too late to repine now. Both father and mother felt this, and, however sorrowful they might be, they were silent, neither demurring nor assenting to Benjamin's proposition. ("CB" 231)

Their silence could be a reflection of their inner conflict between their wish for stopping their son's ambition and their wish for respecting his agency. As Nathan admits later in his overnight meditation, Benjamin has been the apple of their eye since he was born: "It were hard to thwart th' child of our old age, and we waitin' so long for to have 'un!" ("CB" 233)—the father was "upwards of forty years of age," while the mother "thirty-seven," when they married ("CB" 227). Nathan's indulgence expressed in this citation is the very cause of Benjamin's moral disgrace, so claims Styler: "Benjamin's final dehumanisation of his own family members is the extreme consequence of his indulgent upbringing" ("Monstrous" 477).

Another reference to Nathan's regret to the same effect is inserted in the ensuing talk among Hester, Bessy, and him about Benjamin's proposition. The father, feeling deep responsibility for his son's making "this mad plan," utters the words of repentance which was quoted by Bacigalupo above, "I mun needs make my bairn a gentleman; and we mun pay for it," and considers their payment must be made "in heart's care, and heaviness of soul" ("CB" 232). At the same time, however, in the face of the two women's sentimental and negative way of thinking, Nathan tries to soothe them by viewing the situation in a positive way: "Be thankful to Marcy" for having a tall and healthy son, and let us hope he will "be coming back . . . and be a' for settling in a quiet town like" with Bessy as his wife ("CB" 233). Still, his inward self-accusation continues during the ensuing overnight meditation, "I misdoubt me I hanna done well by th' lad. I misdoubt me sore," followed by his prayer to God, "God be marciful to Hester an' me, if th' lad's gone away! God be marciful!" ("CB" 233).

Nathan's repeated self-reproach and prayers to God recorded in this scene reflect his sincerity in character, paternal affection, and Christian faith. As indicated above, some critics regard his articulation of remorse documented in this scene as representing a theme of this story—parents must take responsibility for their prodigal's moral corruption. A scriptural interpretation of this scene, on the other hand, would be that Nathan's repeated self-accusation and prayers are the signs of his spirit's goodness, and that therefore there should be no serious flaw in his motive for making his beloved son a gentleman, or rather that it might be quite natural for parents to have such an ambition for their children. Styler explains there was social convention of "revering middle-class aspirations and masculine privilege" at that time, and that "these values" led the parents "to bend to

Benjamin's desires and encourage his sense of entitlement" ("Monstrous" 477). If so, Nathan's ambition of making his only son a gentleman looks all the more natural.

Believing in God's mercy, the Apostle John says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1.9). The decision made by repentant Nathan, who regrets his error, is not actually a sin, but quite a natural choice as a loving parent for his child. Viewed in this light, the responsibility for Benjamin's moral downfall could be considered to rest upon Benjamin himself, not upon his parents. Gaskell's true meaning for this story seems to lie in the description of the depth of Nathan's, or the Huntroyd family's, Christian compassion for the prodigal rather than in the description of the cause for the son's dissolute actions (or, of the parents' indulgence towards him). The closing sentence of the story, "the broken-hearted go home, to be comforted by God" ("CB" 270), is the narratorial message of consolation for Nathan and Hester Huntroyds, who are broken-hearted because of their son's cruel act or of their self-reproach to their child rearing, not because of their own sin from the author's viewpoint at least. "God will extend mercy to all who sincerely repent" ("United Church of God," Web), and there are many Scriptural verses emphasizing God's mercy for the repentant (for instance, 2 Chron. 7.14; Ps. 103.10-11; Acts 3.19; 1 John 1.9). God is merciful even for sinners, why not for the broken-hearted who have not sinned?—is the message implied in this closing sentence. "God is merciful in nature" is one of the principal beliefs of the Unitarians (Wheeler, "Unitarianism" 26; See also "*RU&Bible*" 149; Millard 5).

In fact, the causes of Benjamin's moral decline are hinted at in Nathan's meditation on his way home after meeting Mr Lawson, the old attorney and

Benjamin's school teacher—i.e. Benjamin's thoughtlessness and his wicked school-friends. Although deploring his son's weakness in character, "I didna think he had it in him to be so thowtless, young as he is," Nathan tries to take a positive view about his son's future, "Well, well! he'll, may be, get more wisdom i' Lunnon. Anyways, it's best to cut him off fra such evil lads as Will Hawker, and such-like. It's they as have led my boy astray," and stresses the essential goodness of his darling son, "He were a good chap till he knowed them—a good chap till he knowed them" ("CB" 234).

Nathan is not simply indulgent, but strict as well. His strictness is implied in the following two citations. One day, when Benjamin comes home "before making his great start to London," his "father kept him at a distance, and was solemn and quiet in his manner to the young man" ("CB" 234). On the night of his departure for London, Bessy hears her uncle give admonition to her fiancé: "Another long pause—in which she could but indistinctly hear continued words, it might have been advice, it might be a prayer, for it was in her uncle's voice—and then father and son came up to bed" ("CB" 236). The following citation depicting the parents' sensibility to notice their son's wickedness also indicates that he is not blindly indulgent. When Benjamin comes back home from London for the first time nearly in 18 months²¹ as "a bad, hard, flippant young man, with yet enough of specious manners and handsome countenance to make his appearance striking," the old parents are discreet enough to judge their son's real state: "they had too much fine instinct in their homely natures not to know, after a very few minutes had passed, that this was not a true prince" ("CB" 238). Another example showing

²¹ He left for London in the "autumn" ("CB" 236) of the year when his apprentice at Highminster ended, and came back to Nab-End Farm in spring "with the primroses" after "another winter, yet more miserable than the last" passed ("CB" 238).

Nathan neither being unthinkingly nor unhesitatingly indulgent towards his son is found when he writes an angry reply to Benjamin for his demand for “the remainder of his father’s savings”: “The fifteen pounds in the stocking, which Benjamin left, had diminished to little more than three; and to have that required of him in so peremptory a manner! . . . Benjamin had had his portion; and if he could not make it do, so much the worse for him; his father had no more to give him. That was the substance of the letter” (“CB” 246).

3.2.2. Nathan’s Integrity

In addition to the three references to Nathan’s repentance for his upbringing of his only son recorded in the two-and-a-half page scene of his response to Benjamin’s wish for working in London (“CB” 231, 232, 233), there is another reference to his repentance in the narratorial description of Nathan, who has given up his son as dead “for many days” (“CB” 250) after his second letter to Benjamin was returned undelivered: “he wanted her [Hester’s] sympathy in his grief, his self-reproach, his weary wonder as to how and what they had done wrong in the treatment of their son, that he had been such a care and sorrow to his parents” (“CB” 251). This implies Nathan’s remorse or self-accusation has continued for “a . . . few months” (“CB” 251) at least until the burglary night of “November the twelfth” (“CB” 267) since his letter stamped “Dead Letter Office” arrived on one day in “summer” (“CB” 250). As discussed in the previous Section 3.2.1, Nathan’s repentance signifies not merely his acknowledgement of indulgent upbringing of Benjamin, but also his sincerity in character and his deep Christian faith. References to his sincere actions based on his faith in God are scattered over the text from the beginning of the 44-page text to its end.

For instance, he is dismissed by Hester Rose's parents "in somewhat cavalier fashion" and "without much consultation of her feelings" to whom he has been a "farm servant," because he approached her "when her parents thought she might do better" ("CB" 227). He must have felt devastated, but simply drifted "far away from his former connections" ("CB" 227), which is a sign of his manly pride. One day when he knows the social decline of his former master's family, Nathan consciously or unconsciously demonstrates the Apostle Paul's teaching of bearing no ill-feelings towards our oppressors: "avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath" (Rom. 12.19). Although having "had a kind of growling satisfaction . . . in hearing of these turns of Fortune's wheel," he has it last only "for a minute or two," and determines to see his former love Hester at Mrs Thompson's in Ripon ("CB" 227).

When Hester sorrows bitterly over the loss of her brother, Nathan shows her "much quiet sympathy, although he could not but remember that Jack Rose had added insult to the bitterness of his youth" ("CB" 229). He helps "his wife to make ready to go by the waggon to Leeds," makes "light of the household difficulties," fills "her purse, that she might have wherewithal to alleviate the immediate wants of her brother's family," and, when she leaves for Leeds, asks her to "bring back one of Jack's wenches for company" ("CB" 229) to lighten his widow's burden of child rearing. Nathan here becomes a performer of Christ's teaching of "love for enemies": "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5. 44-45). Nathan's love for enemies is demonstrated also in the whole family's reluctance to bring charges against Benjamin over the robbery. At the York assize, in answer to

the question of the prisoners' counsel to confirm the existence of the third robber, i.e. Benjamin, Nathan utters the words of deliberate ambiguity with the obvious intention of trying to protect his son from being identified as a member of the burglar group: "It were like our Benjamin's [voice]. I see whatten yo're driving at, sir, and I'll tell yo' truth, though it kills me to speak it. I dunnot say it were our Benjamin as spoke, mind yo'—I only say it were like—" ("CB" 268). Actually, the father at the court trial has no intention of regarding his erring son as his enemy, but simply suffers an emotional conflict between his disappointment at Benjamin's betrayal of his trust and his fatherly love for his fiendish son.

Even after having heard "sad reports about his only child, and . . . told them solemnly to his wife—as things too bad to be believed" while Benjamin is in London, Nathan has no intention to give up his hope, and prays to God in his sore distress for assistance and mercy: "God help us, if he is indeed such a lad as this!" ("CB" 237). Nathan's action is prompted by his belief in the Apostle Paul's promise of God's mercy: "God . . . comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Cor. 1.3-4).

Nathan's "child-like reliance" on Divine Providence is referred to as a positive quality when he wonders about his and his wife's future after Benjamin and Bessy are "settled far away from Nab-end": "he had a child-like reliance that 'God would take care of him and his missus, somehow or anodder. It wur o' no use looking too far ahead'" ("CB" 243; emphasis added). The adjective "child-like," in contrast, is interpreted in a negative sense by Styler: "The family's recurrent hope that he will, like the Bible's prodigal son, return repentant, is gently mocked as 'child-like' . . . since it ignores the realities of his conditioning" ("The Problem"

35). This difference in interpretation of the meaning of the adjective comes from the difference in interpretation of the parents' actions towards their son. One considers they are full of indulgence which causes the son's moral corruption. For instance, Styler asserts, "The tragedy of the tale lies in its implication that it is the parents who are ultimately to blame for what Benjamin becomes. Their love for him, while deep and in one sense unselfish—for they make sacrifices to give him what he wants, and never complain about the hurt he causes them—is nonetheless dangerous. For their love is indulgent" ("Monstrous" 476). Jay calls Nathan "the lazy father" ("Reports" 181) who fails to perform paternal responsibility. The other regards that the parents' actions are filled with selfless affection for their son which chimes and morally accords with their fervent faith in God, and therefore should hardly be the principal cause for his moral frailty which should lie in his own feebleness in character. The latter's interpretation of the meaning of "child-like" has a close association with Christ's praise of childlike innocence, purity, and humbleness: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18.3-4), and also with the Gaskell household's "spiritual education of children" which "focused upon divine love, protection, and forgiveness" (*Private Voices* 83).

Indeed, Nathan's belief in the next world, as an apparent sign of his piety, is expressed in his utterance made in response to Benjamin's articulation of his intention to marry Bessy: "It will be a dree day for us, then . . . But God'll have us in his keeping, and 'll may-happen be taking more care on us i' heaven by that time than Bess, good lass as she is, has had on us at Nab-end" ("CB" 242; emphasis added). The narrator remarks that the parents' agony continuing since the loss of

their beloved Benjamin prompts Nathan to read “a chapter in the Bible aloud, the last thing at night.” The citation taken from the scene brings to light the Huntroyds’ faith in God and belief in the next world: “the very fact of opening the book seemed to soothe those old bereaved parents; for it made them feel quiet and safe in the presence of God, and took them out of the cares and troubles of this world into that futurity which, however dim and vague, was to their faithful hearts as a sure and certain rest” (“CB” 254; emphasis added). For, in that condition, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Rev. 7.17). These references to the next world is significant in that they imply Gaskell’s belief in the everlasting life, one of the principal beliefs in the Christian creed the Plan of Salvation.

The narratorial descriptions of the three characters in this Bible-reading night are heart-warming as if to stress the efficacy of Christian faith which is “grateful and soothing to this household” (“CB” 254). According to Sharps, “Gaskell’s own appreciation of, and feeling for, traditional forms of life come out well” in this incidental scene depicting “the family custom of sitting around the fire-side to listen while the old farmer read a chapter from the Scriptures” (*O&I* 329). The “tallow candle between” Nathan and the Bible is “throwing a strong light on his reverent, earnest face” (“CB” 254); since light is a symbol of Christ (John 8.12; Ps. 27.1; Isa. 60.19), this picture signifies the Saviour’s power of healing stretching over the father. With “her head bowed in attentive listening . . . when a promise came, or any good tidings of great joy,” his wife Hester says “‘Amen’ with fervour” (“CB” 254); as “any good tidings of great joy” could probably mean her son’s return to the mother, her agreement implies she is still keeping her hope. The mind of Bessy, who is sitting by her aunt, “might be on thoughts of those who were absent”

("CB" 254); the message conveyed through this narratorial explanation should be the continuation of her caring for her absent fiancée Benjamin.

Nathan's paternal affection with masculine discretion towards Benjamin which is kept deep inside of his heart is embedded in the text. For instance, he pays "all the debts that he knew of, soon after Benjamin had gone up to London" ("CB" 239). The father's manly pride is expressed in his concealment of the hard work he did by the sweat of his brow to earn Benjamin's tuition fee: "Nathan could safely rely on himself never in his most unguarded moments to reproach his son with the hardly-earned hundreds that had been spent on his education" ("CB" 239). In response to Benjamin's demand of 300 pounds, Nathan gives him instructional admonishment mixed with paternal affection: "whether thou'rt a good 'un or not, thou'rt our flesh and blood, our only bairn, and if thou'rt not all as a man could wish, it's, may-be, been the fault on our pride i' thee" ("CB" 241). Soon after sending a reply of flat rejection to Benjamin's request for further money ("CB" 246), Nathan writes another letter "with infinite pains and various times, to tell his child, in kinder words and at greater length than he had done before, the reasons why he could not send him the money demanded" ("CB" 249). When the letter is returned with "Dead Letter Office" stamped on its top, Nathan comes to believe that his child has been "starved to death, without money, in a wild, wide, strange place" ("CB" 249), and feels so deep self-accusation accordingly as to become "so deadly ill . . . weary and indifferent to life," and "an old man in looks and constitution by ten years for that week of bed" ("CB" 250). These narratorial descriptions highlight Nathan's depth of fatherly attachment to Benjamin.

Even after holding a "belief in his son's death," Nathan cannot give him up for dead at heart. The nondelivery of his second letter to Benjamin throws him

into despair only to feel his son must have been dead. To Bessy's repeated words of consolation, "He's noan dead; it's just been a flitting," Nathan shakes his head, and tries to be convinced ("CB" 250), but, the narrator confirms that his self-reproach is so intense that his son's supposed death "was a steady belief in his own heart for all that" ("CB" 250). This hidden intensity of his fatherly love for Benjamin is revealed also in his jealousy for John Kirkby when he thinks the farmer might marry his son's fiancée: "he discovered, to his own surprise, that he had not that implicit faith which would make it easy for him to look upon Bessy as the wife of another man than the one to whom she had been betrothed in her youth ("CB" 253). The intensity of Nathan's paternal affection is hinted at in his secret wish for Benjamin's safe departure from England even after he heard his son's devilish suggestion of killing his own mother on the burglary night. It is hinted at in Bessy's observation of her uncle's anxiety: "she noticed the quick, watching, waiting glance of his eye, whenever she returned from any person or place where she might have been supposed to gain intelligence if Benjamin were suspected or caught" ("CB" 265). On "the eve of the day of trial," the narrator remarks, "Nathan. . . . was almost passive under his old wife's trembling caresses; he seemed hardly conscious of them, so rigid was his demeanour" ("CB" 266). His paralysed sense "reveals the farmer himself as a man of honor and dignity" (Bacigalupo 126), since it is another sign of the depth of his unreciprocated affection for his immoral son.

Admitting Nathan's virtuous character, Styler states, "Nathan has no aspirations to become rich or to separate himself from his community. There is less 'ego' about his identity altogether than Benjamin's, and Nathan is one of many caring male characters created by Gaskell who refuted the Victorian truism that social virtues were a female specialism" ("The Problem" 37-38). The above survey

of his Christian integrity makes the reader wonder if, although his compassion for his son might contain some attributes of parental indulgence, to describe it as the cause of Benjamin's moral decline is what Gaskell really meant for her story (Because of the disproportion between Nathan's indulgence, which is relatively modest and covert, and Benjamin's offence against his parents, which is ostentatious and overt, some readers may feel that Benjamin's heartlessness far outstrips any errors his parents may have made in his upbringing. The same doubt cannot help being conceived when a similar survey of Christian elements is carried out on his wife Hester's bottomless affection for her son which comes from her "child-like" reliance in God.

3.3. Hester Huntroyd's Christianity

Hester's maternal affection for Benjamin looks so sincere, genuine, everlasting, and even sacred as to be judged as a ground for her indulgence towards her son. Acknowledging the narrator's underscoring her motherly love and Bessy's altruistic love, Fran Baker offers a feminist interpretation of "The Crooked Branch," which she insists shares the qualities of George Eliot's work in "its emphasis on the feminine values of mercy, love and sympathy over the masculine values of judgement, authority and the law" ("Introd" xxi). Also admitting the holiness of Hester's affection for her only child, Saracino asserts that her excessive forgiveness damages its virtuous quality: "forgiveness, when not coupled with moderation, can turn from something noble and beautiful to something ugly and deadly perverting the benevolent quality of the virtue itself" ("Interpreting" 120). In comparison with both critics' interpretations of Hester's motherly love for Benjamin conducted without paying due attention to Gaskell's affiliation with the Plan of Salvation, our approach to it shall be made from a religious angle to argue that

the author's repeated references to the depth of Hester's maternal affection are meant to contrast her Christian virtue with her son's Satanic evil with the effect of making it symbolize the enduring love of our Heavenly Father for His impenitent children, i.e. us human beings.

"Hester's hope of Christian consolation in the prodigal son parable is shown to be an empty one" (Baker, "Introd." lxv), or "the terrible irony" (Easson, *EG* 213), because her prodigal son who reappears as if "liken to a resurrection" ("CB" 265) is not repentant as the Prodigal Son in the biblical parable. Hester's reading the parable of the Prodigal Son may neither necessarily be empty nor ironical, should the story be viewed from this Christian angle, because the parable is used through a comparison with the repentant prototype to draw the reader's attention to the horror of the morally-corrupt prodigal who is unrepentant despite his family's Godlike tolerance towards his demolish self-centredness. This interpretation matches "the story's original context" (Baker, "Introd." iii) where Gaskell was requested to write a story of a room "haunted not by ghosts but by the memories and imaginations of" its occupant (Baker, "Introd." viii) for *All the Year Round's* Christmas number titled *The Haunted House*, by the editor Charles Dickens, whose hope was to show that we human beings were "haunted by our past, by our selves, not by wandering spirits" (Harry Stone, qtd. in Baker, "Introd." viii). For, Gaskell's intended meaning for this story should probably be to spotlight through a "sympathetic portrait of well-intentioned parents who nonetheless produce a hardened criminal in their son Benjamin" (Linda K. Hughes, "The Worker" 31) the horror of "a hardened criminal" in a human being, or the horror of the impenitent sinners who show no respect for God's mercy.

3.3.1. Hester's Piety

Hester's virtuous character as a pious Christian is depicted in various ways in the text. For instance, in response to Nathan's kindness towards the bereaved family of her dead brother, Hester expresses her humble gratitude towards her husband and her Heavenly Father: "Hester had such a silent swelling of gratitude in her heart, as was both thanks to her husband, and thanksgiving to God" ("CB" 229). The brief reference to her humility implies her being a faithful follower of the teachings of the Apostle James: "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (Jas. 4.6), and "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (Jas. 4.10). Hester's faith in Divinity is hinted at when it is agreed several years after the disappearance of Benjamin that most of the Huntroyds' property will be sold to their neighbouring farmer Job Kirkby to scale it down to their manageable size. She takes a positive view of this alteration, feeling "thankful to the Lord," as they can still keep their house and a small portion of their dairy work ("CB" 252). It signifies not merely that she follows the Apostle Paul's teaching that "God . . . will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10.13), but also that she still keeps her hope for her son's return to be forgiven by her husband, as in "a pretty story i' the Gospel about the Prodigal" ("CB" 252). Benjamin should be able to find his house as long as it is placed in the same location. An especially conspicuous reference to her "loving, piteous manner" ("CB" 265) is found in her constant devotion to her husband depicted "for a week or more" after the "fearful night" of burglary ("CB" 265). Although "her heart bled inwardly," Hester endeavours to make her sorrow "softer . . . as became one of her faithful and pious nature," only to recover "her strength sooner than her husband"

("CB" 265). The narrator observes, "There was something so very humble and touching in Hester's blind way of feeling about for her husband—stern, wobegone Nathan—and mutely striving to console him in the deep agony" ("CB" 265). Hester has "evidently so great and anxious a love for her husband" ("CB" 266) as to comfort the heart-broken Nathan by repeating "such texts as she had heard at church in happier days, and which she thought, in her true, simple piety, might tend to console him" ("CB" 266). Thus, the goodness of Hester's spirit is emphasized as if to indicate Gaskell's conscious or unconscious affinity to the concept of the Plan of Redemption.

3.3.2. Hester's Motherly Love

The story is sprinkled with Hester's powerful and everlasting love for Benjamin. For example, in answer to Nathan's anger against his son's "mad plan" ("CB" 232) of working at "London for a year or two" ("CB" 231), Hester as well as her niece Bessy tries to be protective and sympathetic towards Benjamin. Unable to bear her husband's accusation, she defends her son, saying "It's not his fault" ("CB" 232). The "two women sat in sympathetic defiance of any blame that should be thrown on the beloved absent" ("CB" 232). With the help of Bessy, Hester provides "the home-spun, home-made shirts" for Benjamin, who cares nothing about their sacrifices given to make the hand-made linen shirts ("CB" 235-36). Hester's selfless devotion to her son is hinted at also in her willing acceptance of her husband's proposal of giving their bank savings to Benjamin: "Poor Hester was a little startled at the sudden change in the destination of the sum, which she had long thought of with secret pride as 'money i' th' bank.' But she was willing enough to part with it, if necessary, for Benjamin" ("CB" 243). Even after Benjamin left Nab-End Farm for London, his bed was "every now and then . . . thoroughly aired" by

his old mother ("CB" 255). The narrator's ensuring explanation is intended to bring to light the strength of Hester's maternal love for her son: "But this she did in her husband's absence, and without saying a word to anyone; nor did Bessy offer to help her, though her eyes often filled with tears, as she saw her aunt still going through the hopeless service" ("CB" 255). The adjective "hopeless" could be read in three ways at least: (a) first, as implying that Hester performs the service without any real hope, (b) second, as suggesting that Bessy sees Benjamin's return as hopeless even when Hester does not, or (c) third, as hinting at the narrator's device for manipulating the reader's anticipation that it is indeed hopeless, to heighten the dramatic effect of the ensuing event of his return. Probably, the first reading is misleading, since it is disclosed in her husband's testimony at the court trial recorded at the closing section of the story that Hester has always been keeping the hope of his coming back like "the Prodigal I' th' Gospels" ("CB" 268). The validity of the second reading should depend upon how Bessy's meditation in the Bible reading scene on the burglary night is interpreted where she thinks of "those who were absent" ("CB" 254). If her thought of the absent Benjamin is hopeful, the reading should be unsuitable; if not, it should be valid. The narrator seems to make Bessy's mind equivocal on purpose, as she writes that "perhaps" it is "a little wandering to some household cares, or it might be on thoughts of those who were absent" ("CB" 254), to heighten the dramatic effect of her old fiancé's return. The third reading seems to be most valid in consideration of what actually happens in the story. By making the reader anticipate with this adjective that Benjamin's return will be hopeless, the narrator hints at her intention to enhance the impact of the prodigal's reappearance.

The profundity of Hester's motherly affection for Benjamin is featured in her fervent attempt to believe in his repentance and rehabilitation which is described rather critically by the narrator as futile, hopeless, and illogical. One "spring" ("CB" 237) day approximately six months after her son's "autumn" ("CB" 236) departure for London, Nathan tells his wife "sad reports about his only child" ("CB" 237), probably including the "worst" subject which has been kept "in his own breast" ("CB" 234) since he returned from his visit to the Highminster attorney Mr Lawson, Benjamin's master, two days after his son made his proposition to go to London, as the narrator inserts a special note here that Nathan told them to his wife "solemnly . . . as things too bad to be believed" ("CB" 237). To her husband, Hester proposes to keep the reports from Bessy, because her niece's heart will "break wi' a little, and she'd be apt to fancy it were true. . . . and . . . if she thinks well on him, and loves him, it will bring him straight!" ("CB" 237-38). In contrast to her husband's prayer-like reply "God grant it!", Hester's "God shall grant it!" is a stronger articulation of her belief in Him, although, the narrator laments, her passionate repetition of the phrase sounds "vain" ("CB" 238). Their dialogue ends with Hester's self-soothing comment, "Bessy knows nought on [the reports], and nother you nor me belie'es 'em; that's one blessing" ("CB" 238). The narrator closes this short—only about half-a-page long—scene by the rhetorical question, "But if they did not in their hearts believe them [sad reports about Benjamin], how came they to look so sad and worn, beyond what mere age could make them?" ("CB" 238), as if to imply that the Huntroyds themselves have noticed that their hope might hardly be fulfilled. If so, Hester's ardent attempt to disregard what the sorrowful report about her son insinuates, as expressed in her utterances—it is "a little" matter, Bessy would "be apt to fancy it were true," and the

parents' believing nothing about it is "one blessing"—, becomes all the more pitiful because of her earnestness in her hope. This short dialogue between Nathan and Hester describes the latter's desperate, tenacious, and fervent belief in her son's innocence and God's mercy.

The narratorial comments on the vanity and illogicality of her assertion which could be an honest representation of the reader's feelings to it, however, seems only to intensify the strength of Hester's faith. Although sensible enough to suspect the truth of the unhappy rumours about Benjamin, she never gives up her seemingly vain hope for his moral reformation. In her heart at this time, she must have been holding her belief in the following teaching of Jesus Christ: "If ye have faith . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17.20). This is nothing but the sign of her profound love for her son.

Hester's seemingly illogical but inwardly logical belief in miracles is featured also in the couple's different views of their missing son's whereabouts. While Nathan expresses his conviction of Benjamin's death "in his grief, his self-reproach, his weary wonder as to how and what they had done wrong in the treatment of their son, that he had been such a care and sorrow to his parents," Hester rejects his pessimism "with her whole will, heart, and soul" ("CB" 251). The intensity of her maternal love depicted in the next citation is almost equal in strength to her faith in the supernatural power of God:

She could and would not believe—nothing should make her believe—that her only child Benjamin had died without some sign of love or farewell to her. No arguments could shake her in this. She believed that, if all natural means of communication between her and him had been cut off at the last supreme moment—if death had come upon

him in an instant, sudden and unexpected—her intense love would have been supernaturally made conscious of the blank. (“CB” 251)

The period is not specifically mentioned, but, judging from a careful investigation into the chronology of the tale (See Table 3), presumably around “eight or nine years” (“CB” 255) after Nathan’s second letter to Benjamin was returned home with the “Dead Letter Office” stamp on its top in “summer” (“CB” 248), a plan is made to sell a large part of the land of Nab-End Farm to “a neighbouring farmer, Job Kirkby” (“CB” 252), to make the dairy farm manageable by the old couple and their “nearly eight-and-twenty” (“CB” 253) year-old niece. Hester’s talk about this plan to Bessy contains her strong motherly love for Benjamin and her innocent belief in Divine forgiveness. Here, she first feels “thankful to the Lord” as they can continue to stay in the current house, for, if not, “the lad would na’ know where to find us when he came back fra’ Merikay.” She barely doubts that Benjamin has gone to America “to make his fortune,” and that “he ’ll be home some day.” She continues to tell Bessy her belief in her husband’s forgiveness of their son who will certainly come back, “I’m sure our Nathan ’ll be ready to forgive him, and love him, and make much of him. . . . It’ll be liken to a resurrection to our Nathan,” stressing she “never gave in to ’s death” (“CB” 252). Hester’s faith in God, and her hope and love for her son, are testified by her husband in the York assize: “she had allays thought he would come back to us, like the Prodigal i’ th’ Gospel” (“CB” 268).

Hester’s seemingly illogical but purely sincere belief in Benjamin being alive is the same as the ardent belief of Anne Leigh, the prodigal Lizzie’s mother, who asserts, in answer to her elder son Will’s insistence of Lizzie’s most-likely death, that “she is not dead . . . God will not let her die till I’ve seen her once again”

("LL" 8). Anne's strong belief in her daughter's being alive makes her have even a paranormal experience of hearing Lizzie's voice: "I've fancied . . . I heard her crying upon me; and I've thought the voice came closer and closer, till at last it was sobbing out 'Mother' close to the door" ("LL" 7). The two mothers of the prodigal children are rewarded for their fervent faith in God: they can meet their missing children in the mortal world, although it is a painful meeting in the case of Benjamin's mother.

The most crucial difference between the two mothers, however, is that, while Anne Leigh's child is repentant, Hester Huntroyd's is not. The latter's unhappy experience is regarded as representing "the terrible irony of Hester's consolation in the Bible" (Easson, *EG* 213), or "Gaskell's refusal to allow any kind of earthly reconciliation between parents and son, however transitory" (Baker, "Introd." xv). The irony here seems to lie in a little reading of the narrative of the Prodigal Son as something that is likely to happen rather than as a moral parable. Hester's case, hence, could be construed as suggesting that there is a case in this mortal life in which we cannot naively depend upon scriptural consolation. Nevertheless, it might not be if it is viewed in terms of the Plan of Salvation. Jesus teaches the power of faith—"Have faith in God. . . . What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 1.22-24)—and the power of God's mercy—"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5.4). In addition, the "broken-hearted" in the closing sentence of the tale—"But the broken-hearted go Home, to be comforted of God" ("CB" 270)—could be interpreted as implying not merely Hester herself, but also both Bessy's "uncle and aunt" (Baker, "Introd." x) and also people in general. What these scriptural verses promise is that, whomever the object may be, those who

feel sad should be comforted by the Heavenly Father in the current world or in the next. What this closing sentence denotes, therefore, is Gaskell's implication that Hester will certainly be comforted by God in her postmortal life where she will be able to meet the repentant Benjamin (otherwise, she will never be comforted). From the viewpoint of eternal life, accordingly, Hester's unhappy experience could be neither a terrible irony nor an authorial refusal to allow any reconciliation between parents and son.

3.4. Bessy Rose's Goodness

In addition to Nathan and Hester Huntroyd, Bessy Rose is also described as a contrast to Benjamin in Christian integrity. Many hints for her goodness are incorporated into the story probably in order to highlight the fundamental difference between Bessy and her cousin in their ethical standards. This view is shared by Saracino, who considers Bessy is "his very opposite" ("Interpreting" 116), by Sharps, who observes "the old couple's niece . . . stands in virtuous contrast to her disreputable cousin" (*O&I* 325), and by Baker, who states the "contrast in values is particularly marked in the depiction of Benjamin and Bessy . . . the boy grows selfish and worldly while the girl maintains her spiritual and caring ideals" ("Introd." xvi-xvii).

Bessy grows up to be "a bright affectionate, active girl; a daily comfort to her uncle and aunt," and "so much a darling in the household" ("CB" 229). The dutiful girl persuades "herself that what her uncle and aunt loved so dearly it was her duty to love dearest of all" ("CB" 229). When the 18-year old Benjamin declines "becoming . . . a hard-working honest farmer like his father," the "little girl of fourteen instinctively" feels that there is "something wrong about him" ("CB" 231). After Benjamin goes away to London, she is sensitive enough to feel that he has

made light of “the affection and duty that a son owed to his parents” (“CB” 235). On a spring day after the Huntroyds spend a dreary winter with heavy heart after Benjamin left for the capital city, Bessy articulates a positive view of life on her way back home from “afternoon church”: “there never will be such a dreary, miserable winter again as this has been” (“CB” 237).

Bessy’s goodness becomes prominent especially in the events which take place about “a year after” (“CB” 246) Benjamin leaves Nab-End Farm to join his London partnership with his father’s gift of 200 pounds. When she knows that her uncle sent a reply of rejection to Benjamin’s letter of demanding “the remainder of his father’s savings” (“CB” 246), she believes that “he never could have written such a letter to his father, unless his want of money had been very pressing and real,” and sends him all savings she has increased since a child with a tender-hearted note “Repayment not kneeded” (“CB” 247). Some weeks after (“CB” 248), Nathan’s second reply to Benjamin written “to tell his child, in kinder words and at greater length than he had done before, the reasons why he could not send him the money demanded” (“CB” 249) is returned to him undelivered. The self-concocted conviction that “his child had been starved to death, without money, in a wild, wide, strange place” (“CB” 249) makes Nathan accuse himself so acutely of his unkindness towards his own child that he becomes “weary and indifferent to life” and “an older man in looks and constitution by ten years” (“CB” 250). In addition, he even goes to church “with a strip of cape . . . round his hat” as “his sign of mourning” (“CB” 251). Bessy comforts her uncle with her firm belief “in her own view of the case” that “He’s noan dead, uncle; he’s just flitted” (“CB” 249). Her kind words of consolation sound convincing, particularly because the reader has

noticed Nathan's self-accusation is a reflection of his deep affection for his son, and that there is no moral fault in his paternal criticism of his son's extravagance.

Even in the time of "the blow which told so miserably upon the energies of all the household at Nab-end" caused by Benjamin's supposed death, "Bessy would either do field work, or attend to the cows and the shippon, or churn, or make cheese; she did all well, no longer merrily, but with something of stern cleverness" ("CB" 251). She is "the soonest comforted" among the Huntroyd family because of her ability to find "a vent for her sorrow in action" ("CB" 247). Spotlighting "her ability to survive and take an active rather than a passive role in events," Baker observes that she "forms the focus for hope in an otherwise bleak story" ("Introd." xv). Bessy's taking positive actions even in the afflicting conditions mirrors the Old Testament teaching that "The thoughts of the diligent *tend* only to plenteousness" (Prov. 21.5), and the Apostle Paul's that "we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly" (Heb. 13.18).

Bessy's conscious or unconscious exercise of another teaching of the Apostle Paul—"avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. . . . Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12.19-21)—is found during nearly ten years of "deep hopeless sorrow" ("CB" 253) which makes her uncle irritable. Bessy "loved him so dearly and respected him so much, that . . . she never returned him a rough or impatient word," and, therefore, she had after all "a reward in the conviction of his deep, true affection for her, and her aunt's entire and most sweet dependence upon her" ("CB" 253).

Bessy's tender meditation of "her dear cousin and playfellow, her early lover" on her bed at the robbery night is another sign of her being a follower of Paul the

Apostle's advice about no vengeance: "this very giving him up for ever involved a free, full forgiveness of all his wrongs to her" ("CB" 256). Bessy's ensuing recollection of Benjamin's innocent childhood—"She thought tenderly of him, as of one who might have been led astray in his later years, but who existed rather in her recollection as the innocent child, the spirited lad, the handsome, dashing young man" ("CB" 256)—is inserted not only to accentuate her exercise of the Apostle Paul's advice of seeing the good aspects of a human being, but also to give a more dramatic impact on Benjamin's cruelty on the coming burglary.

Even in the robbery scene, Bessy's bravery and tenderness are highlighted. Her undaunted courage is explicit in her thought that, "with a great cry," she will spring after the third burglar ("CB" 258). Following the demand of John Kirkby the neighbouring farmer, she runs "off to th' stable," and fetches "ropes and gear-ing for to bind" the robbers in the dark night ("CB" 259). Feeling sorry for the half-conscious robber being treated roughly, she runs "to get him a cup of water to moisten his lips" ("CB" 260). Bessy's consideration for the suffering of others is depicted also in her chafing the "cold feet" of her old uncle and aunt, who are nearly dead with "a sore fright" after the burglary ("CB" 261). The narrator concludes the scene by stressing Bessy's "pious duties" of selfless care for the Huntroyds: "All the rest of that terrible night, Bessy tended the poor old couple with constant care, her own heart so stunned and bruised in its feelings that she went about her pious duties almost like one in a dream" ("CB" 263).

Bessy's last talk with Benjamin discloses their clear difference in moral uprightness, i.e. her seriousness in contrast to his shallowness. What he proposes to her in exchange for his release from the stair closet is all his "father's money." "D'ye think I care for that?", says Bessy vehemently, and continues "I wish there

was noan such a thing as money i' the world" ("CB" 261). Her answer links itself to Jesus's teaching—"Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6.24)—which she holds as her inborn criterion for moral judgement, while Benjamin's utterance implies that he considers his family's immeasurable affection for him as measurable at a "base materialistic level" (Baker, "Introd." lxiv). The next quotation taken from the scene where she releases him—"I charge yo' never to let me see your face again. I'd ne'er ha' let yo' loose but for fear o' breaking their hearts, if yo' hanna killed him already" ("CB" 261)—is her parting words to her long-time fiancé. They disclose that there is her incalculable consideration for Benjamin's "aged parents, who, she hopes, will never know of his villainy" (Saracino, "Interpreting" 118) behind her determination to release him. In contrast, he calculates her considerate action of release by the material value of money. This is one of the worst instances of his moral corruption, and this is why Bessy makes the declaration of parting with him. "Throughout the story," Baker correctly claims, "the shallow, mercenary values of the young man are highlighted by contrast with the spiritual, caring values of the heroine and her aunt" ("Introd." lxiv).

The narrator closes "the climactic scene of the robbery" (Saracino, "Interpreting" 118) by emphasizing the superficiality of his self-centred action: "But, before she had ended her speech, he was gone—off into the black darkness, leaving the door open wide" ("CB" 261). Benjamin's action denotes that he hardly listens to Bessy's reminder of his family's life-long devotion for him and of his merciless ignorance of their affection when he runs away from his house. Benjamin's going "off into the black darkness" is symbolic in terms of Christian morality, since it signifies his complete separation from God, as indicated in such biblical verses as "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide

in darkness” (John 12.46) and “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1.5). Immediately after his departure, Bessy relieves “her soul by giving a great and exceeding bitter cry” (“CB” 261). The presumable reasons for her crying would be (a) her shock of having witnessed his horrible vice right in front of her as well as (b) her inexplicable sorrow for having confirmed the final separation from her fiancé whom she has loved for nearly 20 years.²²

The depth of Bessy’s consideration for Benjamin is hinted at when she agrees to help him be “out of England” (“CB” 261). In addition, she shows her attempt to hide his involvement into the attack from the neighbouring farmer John Kirkby and the “cow-doctor” (“CB” 259) Atkinson by crying “Ne’er give heed to” what the robber bound and watched in the shippon says because “Folks o’ his sort are allays for dragging other folks into their mischief” (“CB” 262). John Kirkby’s information about “the capture of the two burglars” that “the participation of that unnatural Third was unknown” is “a relief” (“CB” 263) for her. Her consideration for the old couple is hinted at also in her willing effort “to relieve the old man’s anxiety” and in her thankfulness for their son’s escape from the reach of arrest (“CB” 265).

A character who supports the prodigal is provided in the three prodigal short stories—Susan Palmer for Lizzie Leigh, Bessy Rose for Benjamin Huntroyd,

²² Bessy before Benjamin enters Highminster Grammar School is described as showing “every unconscious symptom of . . . love for her cousin”: “as she grew older, she grew on in loving, persuading herself that what her uncle and aunt loved so dearly it was her duty to love dearest of all” (“CB” 230). Benjamin is perhaps around 13 years old then, since the age was “the public school entry age” from “the beginning” to “the middle years” of the 19th-century in England (Sally Mitchell 245-46), and this story focuses on the Huntroyd family who lived not “many years after the beginning of this century” (“CB” 227), or the 19th-century, as the short story was first published in “the Extra Christmas Number of” *All the Year Round* “in 1859” (P&C 4: 73). Accordingly, it is presumed that Bessy starts to fancy Benjamin before nine years old, since she is four years younger than he—“By the time he was eighteen . . . Bessy Rose was . . . [the] little girl of fourteen” (“CB” 230-31). Thus, it turns out that her love for Benjamin is continuing for over 20 years since she is “nearly eight-and-twenty” (“CB” 253) when she articulates this parting declaration to the third robber.

and Victorine for Theresa Crowley. The first and the second are similar in moral uprightness, or in their strong faith in God. Anne Leigh, Lizzie's mother, tells her elder son Will about Susan's angelic character: "She's not one to harden her heart against a mother's sorrow. My own lad, she's too good for that. She's not one to judge and scorn the sinner. She's too deep read in her New Testament for that" ("LL" 21). Bessy's goodness in character makes her judicial examination "as little formidable as possible" ("CB" 265).

Bessy is tender-hearted like an angel;²³ Benjamin cold-hearted like a devil. Bacigalupo remarks, "The single issue of the Huntroyd union, Benjamin[,] is doted upon by his parents and their orphaned niece" (118). The above investigation into Christian integrity of the three poses a question as to whether Benjamin is really doted upon by them, or too self-centred to notice their affection and compassion. Although being depicted as a prodigal like Benjamin, Lizzie Leigh is humble enough to feel the deep love and sympathy of her parents and Susan, and strives to be good in the end ("LL" 30). A comparison with Lizzie illuminates the responsibility for his villainous deeds which rests not on his family but on Benjamin himself.

3.5. Benjamin Huntroyd's Sins

Is there any salvation for such a villain as Benjamin? How is its possibility or impossibility hinted at in the short story? This section analyses Benjamin's sins

²³ Even such an angelic character as Bessy is described as having human weakness. She speaks "many a sharp word . . . when her cousin had done anything to displease her on his last visit" ("CB" 247). Her temper could become "high" to other people ("CB" 253). She feels resentment towards John Kirkby for "his officiousness," and troublesome towards Dr Preston for not leaving "her alone with her thoughts" ("CB" 264). So is Susan Palmer. It is one of Gaskell's typical features as a realist novelist to refrain from drawing her characters as perfectly good, or perfectly evil. Even such a criminal as Victorine has virtues in her character. This device probably comes from her Christian belief that all human beings are susceptible to Satan's temptations (Gen. 3.6), but are keeping good spirits within themselves as God's children as well who supported Jesus Christ in the premortal world—"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ". (Rom. 8.16-17).

from a biblical perspective or the perspective of the Plan of Redemption, to point out that he is tempted by the demon of covetousness or Satan, that therefore it is his soul who is responsible for his moral corruption, and that he could be a representation of impenitent human beings who neglect God's unlimited love symbolized by his family's "unconditional forgiveness" (Saracino, "Interpreting" 115).

Critics point out Benjamin's sinfulness by calling him "the monster" (Baker, "Introd." ix), "monstrous" (Styler, "The Problem" 39), "wayward" (Bacigalupo 117), "mean and avaricious" (Bacigalupo 119), "murderous" (Laura Kranzler, "Gothic Themes" 55), "plunderer" (Sharps, *O&I* 325), "weak-willed, ne'er-do-well" (Sharps, *O&I* 326), "a hardened criminal" (Hughes, "The Worker" 31), "the more sinister and unredeemable villain" (Baker, "Introd.," xvi), and "the crooked branch of the patriarchal family tree" (Baker, "Introd.," lxxxv). The prodigal Benjamin actually breaks three at least out of the ten Commandments given to Moses (Exod. 20.2-17; Deut. 5.6-21)—(a) first, 5th: "Honour thy father and thy mother" (Exod. 20.12; Deut. 5.16), (b) second, 8th: "Thou shalt not steal" (Exod. 20.15; Deut. 5.19), and (c) third, 10th: "Thou shalt not covet" (Exod. 20.17; Deut. 5.21). The state of his committing each sin shall be examined in the following sub-Sections to argue that Benjamin's spirit is dominated by the Devil.

3.5.1. "Honour Thy Father and Thy Mother."

Benjamin's dishonouring his parents is emphasised from the start. As growing old, Nathan and Hester anticipate the marriage of their beloved son with his cousin Bessy, but, Benjamin takes their "innocent scheme" ("CB" 231) "all very coolly" ("CB" 230). His disrespect for his parents is expressed also in the following citation where his parents' affection and modest life are contrasted with his superciliousness: "His father and mother were even proud of his airs and graces,

when he came home for the holidays; taking them for proofs of his refinement, although the practical effect of such refinement was to make him express his contempt for his parents' homely ways and simple ignorance" ("CB" 230). Their "homely ways and simple ignorance" are Christian attributes of modesty and simplicity—"God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5.5)—, and hence Benjamin's disdain for them signifies his estrangement from Christian morality. By the time he is 18 years old, Benjamin becomes an apprentice to an attorney at Highminster, declining "becoming . . . a hard-working, honest farmer like his father" ("CB" 231). This citation implies not merely his ambition which might be natural for an educated man to retain, but also his disregard for his father's Christian virtues of "diligence" (2 Pet. 1.10) and "honesty" (1 Tim. 2.2). In addition, this reference to Benjamin's selection of job includes a tint of the narratorial regret about it, since the "labour of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin" (Prob. 10.16). Bessy Rose, his 14-year-old little cousin, "instinctively" feels there is "something wrong about him" ("CB" 231).

Benjamin's behaviours grieve his parents deeply. For instance, his supervisor Mr Lawson's information about him makes Nathan confess "I didna think he had it in him to be so thowtless"; the attorney's news sounds so painful for Hester and Bessy that "the brave old man" cannot help keeping "the worst in his own breast" ("CB" 234). Reports of Benjamin's wrongdoings in London also sadden his parents: the "sad reports about his only child" which are "too bad to be believed" make Nathan raise a prayer "God help us if he is indeed such a lad as this!" ("CB" 237). The subsequent narratorial description spotlights the acuteness of his parents' mental suffering from his misbehaviours: "Their eyes were become too dry

and hollow for many tears; they sat together, hand in hand; and shivered, and sighed, and did not speak many words, or dare to look at each other” (“CB” 237).

The following three examples show Benjamin’s coldness towards his parents, especially towards his mother. (a) First, when she “kissed his cheek, and stroked his hair” as a sign of her affection towards her son before his leaving for London, “Bessy remembered afterwards—long years afterwards—how he had tossed his head away with nervous irritability on one of these occasions, and had muttered—her aunt did not hear it, but Bessy did—‘Can’t you leave a man alone?’” (“CB” 234). It might be going too far to call his attitude “impolite” should he be in adolescence, as it is common for adolescent children to regard their parents’ affection as a nuisance; however, it might not actually be so in Benjamin’s case, since he is about 19 or 20 years old at this time, when he just finished his two-year apprenticeship at Mr Lawson the Highminster attorney (“CB” 230-31). His behaviour towards his mother should be able to be judged as imprudent, ungrateful, and unkind as an adult’s behaviour, as it goes against the Apostle Paul’s teachings “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth” (Eph.4.29), and “Charity . . . Doth not behave itself unseemly” (1 Cor. 13.4-5).

(b) The second example of Benjamin’s negligence of filial duties is found in his objection to “the home-spun, the home-made shirts” which his mother and Bessy “had such pleasure in getting ready for him” (“CB” 235), or the products of Hester’s maternal affection and Bessy’s night work secretly done in consideration for her aunt. Benjamin’s thoughtlessness or ungratefulness towards his mother is hinted at in the following narratorial remark: “All this he did not know; or he could never have complained of the coarse texture, the old-fashioned make of these shirts, and urged on his mother to give him part of her little store of egg and butter

money, in order to buy newer-fashioned linen in Highminster” (“CB” 236). Needless to say, he himself could be considered as innocent in this case because he is unaware of their secret work on his behalf. Notwithstanding, the narrator’s intention to draw the reader’s attention to his insolent arrogance seems obvious; otherwise, she would not insert this episode into her story. Simultaneously, her remark includes the narratorial intention to remind the reader of the virtue in his spirit, or of his reason, as it implies that, if he knew their concealed kindness, he would refrain from uttering such harsh words.

(c) Third, in the following citation from the homely scene on the eve of Benjamin’s second departure for London, brought to light is the stark contrast of Hester’s love for him and Bessy’s sympathy for her aunt with his callous indifference to his family members. Bessy induces her cousin to “sit down next his mother,” as she has noticed that her aunt’s “very heart was yearning after him.” “When once her child was placed by her side, and she had got possession of his hand, the old woman kept stroking it, and murmuring long unused words of endearment, such as she had spoken to him while he was yet a little child” (“CB” 245)—Hester’s sentimentality might be an annoyance for the 21 or 22-year old Benjamin, but looks understandable for the reader who knows her situation where she meets her son for the first time in one and a half years (he left for London in autumn, 1836, and came back home in spring, 1838, according to our chronology in Table 3) and has him leaving for the “place where the devil keeps court” (“CB” 232) only after four-day stay at home. Notwithstanding, “all this was wearisome to him,” and “he yawned loudly.” His cousin’s feelings—“Bessy could have boxed his ears for not curbing this gaping; at any rate, he need not have done it so openly—so almost ostentatiously. His mother was more pitiful” (“CB” 245)—should be the reader’s

as well. Uttering kind words “Thou’rt tired, my lad!”, Hester puts “her hand fondly on his shoulder; but it fell off, as he stood up suddenly, and said—‘Yes, deuced tired! I’m off to bed’” (“CB” 245).

The physical as well as spiritual difference between the parents and the child is emphasized also from the start. This emphasis is probably meant to imply that Benjamin’s physical beauty generates arrogance in his mind, and thus causes his moral laxity. After referring to the rarity of “two plain, homely people” having “a child of uncommon beauty,” the narrator stresses the contrast between them to draw the reader’s attention to the child’s “exceptional” beauty: “The hard-working, labour-and-care-marked farmer, and the mother, who could never have been more than tolerably comely in her best days, produced a boy who might have been an earl’s son for grace and beauty” (“CB” 229-30). In contrast to the parents’ humbleness in character (“CB” 237), their child has “no shyness,” since he is “so accustomed from his earliest years to admiration from strangers and adoration from his parents” for his attractive appearance (“CB” 230). For the 14-year-old Bessy, her 18-year-old cousin looks “so handsome” (“CB” 230). After one and a half year stay in London, the 19 or 20-year-old Benjamin returns home as “a bad, hard, flippant young man, with yet enough of specious manners,” but still “of handsome countenance to make his appearance striking” (“CB” 238). Even after no news is heard about him for “eight or nine years” (“CB” 255), Bessy still thinks “tenderly of him” as “the handsome, dashing young man” (“CB” 256). Gaskell’s purpose of setting Benjamin’s outward charm as a cause for his arrogance is acknowledged and explained by the narrator herself: “The practical effect of this refinement” is “to make him express his contempt for his parents’ homely ways and simple ignorance, and he refuses to become . . . a hard working, honest farmer like his father”

("CB" 230). While modesty is the quality of praise by God, who "resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (Jam. 4.6), arrogance is the quality of His caution: "Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed" (1 Sam. 1.3).

Benjamin's most serious conduct of dishonouring his parents is his shout to one of his fellow robbers "to hold th' oud woman's throat if she did na stop her noise, when hoo'd fain ha' cried for her niece to help" ("CB" 270) in the burglary scene. His moral defect in this climactic scene is where critics' attentions converge. According to Michèle Cohen, it is the boy's lack of "all sentiment" which "can allow his old mother to be attacked for refusing to divulge the whereabouts of the sock" ("A Mother's" 43-44). Baker considers it is his "materialistic values, which contrast so starkly with the more spiritual values of his family" that "ultimately render him willing to steal from and even to kill his parents if they prevent him from getting what he wants" ("Introd." xvi). Observing "It was not a ghost that returned to rob and destroy Nathan and Hester Huntroyd in 'The Crooked Branch' but their only son, Benjamin, who was quite prepared to murder them for their money," Lansbury insists that "This is the truth more horrifying than any visitation of the supernatural" (*EG* 53); Easson views Benjamin's return from the same angle—"Gaskell's hauntings can be the more terrible for not being supernatural" (*EG* 213). The "supernatural" here means ghosts. Taking it into account that "The Crooked Branch" was written as "The Ghost in the Garden Room" in answer to Dicken's request to Gaskell for writing a story for *The Haunted House* in the 1859 Extra Christmas Number of *All the Year Round* (Pilgrim 9: 170; Baker, "Introd." viii; J. G. Sharps, *O&I* 325), the above two critics highlight the indescribable horror of

the evilness of a real human being in comparison with the fear of any visitation of a supernatural being. The Bible finds Satan at the root of this horror of human evilness (2 Cor. 2.11, 11.14-15; 2 Thess. 2.9). According to a scriptural perspective, therefore, Benjamin's order to strangle his own mother is horrifying because it signifies that he is possessed by the Devil.

According to Frances Power Cobbe, "the existence of a Devil. . . is ostensibly accepted by the whole mass members of all the great Churches, Greek, Roman, and Protestant, national and dissenting," but "Only by the small sects of Universalists and Unitarians . . . has it been officially repudiated" ("The Devil" 162). Nonetheless, there is some evidence that Gaskell actually believes in the existence of Satan. For instance, (a) her recognition of Demons is expressed in the protagonist Susan Dixon's view of her idiot brother Will in "Half a Life-Time Ago" (1855) that his mental illness is caused by the demon which has possessed his spirit.

Besides, she separated the idea of the docile, affectionate, loutish, indolent Will, and kept it distinct from the terror which the demon that occasionally possessed him inspired her with. The one was her flesh and her blood—the child of her dead mother; the other was some fiend who came to torture and convulse the creature she so loved. ("HLTA"120)

In her struggle with Will, Susan abuses not her brother but "the third person, the fiendish enemy" who possesses him "in no unmeasured tones" ("HLTA" 120). Her view of devils reminds us of the biblical episode of Jesus's casting them out of the men to go away into the heard of swine where clarified are the existence of devils, "coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce," and the concept of demonic possession (Matt. 8.28-33). The narratorial reference to Susan's notion of Satan's

influence on her brother's health indicates Gaskell's empathy towards the Christian view of "the possessed of the devils" (Matt. 8.33) that human beings are apt to do something evil when they are possessed by the evil spirit.

(b) In addition, even in "The Crooked Branch" (1859), the author's belief in Satan is hinted at when Nathan expresses his fear of the Devil's influence on Benjamin's morality: "Lunnon is a place where the devil keeps court as well as King George; and my poor chap has more nor once welly fallen into his clutches here [in Highminster, where Benjamin's Grammar School is located]. I dunno what he'll do, when he gets close within sniff of him" ("CB" 232-33; emphasis added).

(c) Furthermore, in "Lois the Witch" (1859), Captain Holderness, the old sailor who has accompanied the eponymous heroine Lois Barclay to New England, gives his old friend's orphaned daughter some warnings against the perils of the land—real or imaginable—by referring to Satan's power depicted in the Bible: "Holy Scripture speaks of witches and wizards, and of the power of the Evil One in desert places" ("Lois," P&C 4:12). This passage contains three biblical references at least. The first is the Lord's law for the Israelites that "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exod. 22.18; emphasis added). The editor of the Pickering edition of the story gives two more scriptural citations that allude to the caution against demonic possession and the evil spirit (P&C 4: 449)—"There shall not be found among you *any one* that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through . . . a witch . . . or a wizard" (Deut. 18.10-12; emphasis added); "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (Matt. 4.1; emphasis added). Therefore, Captain Holderness's warnings could be construed as containing Gaskell's foreshadowing the danger of Satan and her recognition of Satanic possession.

(d) “Lois the Witch” provides another instance of the author’s acknowledgement of demonic possession when the narrator alludes to the close association between the witch and Satan which is found in such descriptions as “the witch, who, by influence over Satan, had subjected the child to such torture” (“Lois” 205) and “the crime was . . . largely shared in by evil-minded persons who had chosen to give up their souls to Satan” (“Lois” 219). (e) The authorial depiction of Satan as if a real existence is perceived in the scene of *Sylvia’s Lovers* where dying Philip looks back on what has happened to him so far: “the people, the thoughts, the arguments that Satan had urged in behalf of sin, were reproduced with the vividness of a present time” (*SL* 499). (f) Another sign of Gaskell’s acknowledgement of the Satan’s existence is found in the fear of Satan expressed in *Wives and Daughters* when Sally Browning, the protagonist Molly Gibson’s kind neighbour, pleads “Don’t talk of Satan, please, in this house. No one knows what may happen, if he’s lightly spoken about” (*WC* 541). (g) Gaskell’s humorous simile of the pricks of conscience as sharp as Satan’s piercing in her note about the soothing power of grand picture, holy music, Robert Browning’s poem, and “great external beauty either of nature or art the contemplation of which can put calm into one and take one out of one’s little self—and shame the demon (I beg its pardon) Conscience away; or to sleep” (*Letters* 109-10; emphasis added) might be counted as another sign of her belief in the demon.

(h) Lastly, Gaskell’s recognition of the existence of Satan is hinted at in her note to her friend Catherine Winkworth about “mutual attraction” between man and woman “of which Satan is the originator” (*Letters* 808). Her belief in something supernatural expressed in her confession of seeing a ghost—“I SAW a ghost! Yes I did” (*Letters* 81)—may serve partially as a hint for her belief in the existence

of Demon. Alan Shelston explains the reason for her love of ghost stories as “she actually believed in the existence of the spirit world” (“Exploring” 17). Such being the case, Gaskell’s Unitarianism, in contrast to the orthodox Unitarians who are dubious about something unreasonable, has a tendency to be unorthodox, or flexibly tolerant towards the teachings of the mainstream Christianity, as she herself confesses, “I am not (*Unitarianly*) orthodox!” (*Letters* 784-85).

“Benjamin’s parents” are “simple farmers who wanted the best for their adored son,” but “he has no feeling for his loving parents” (Cohen, “A Mother’s” 43). His dishonouring them, or his violation of God’s fifth Commandment, is implied in the narratorial comment that “politeness was neglected in his authoritative or grumbling manner towards his mother, or his sullen silence before his father” (“CB” 235). The Bible asserts that “he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death” (Exod. 21.15). Benjamin, who surrenders to Satan’s temptations, will be severely punished by his Heavenly Father.

3.5.2. “Thou Shalt Not Covet”; “Thou Shalt Not Steal”

The two more commandments in God’s Ten Commandments that Benjamin breaks are the tenth “Thou shalt not covet,” and the eighth “Thou shalt not steal.” Benjamin’s violations of these two commandments are alluded to by Fran Baker, who claims that he “not only spends all his own money, but also takes” Bessy’s “set aside as an inheritance,” and that “Benjamin’s return to rob his parents incognito, and his apparent willingness to see them die in order to achieve his ends” make “him a more sinister villain than many of the other degenerate young men who people Gaskell’s fiction” (“Introd.” ix). An observation to the similar effect on his sinister violation of the two moral codes is made by Michèle Cohen as well: “Not only does he see his parents merely as sources for money to fund his indulgences,

but he is also so morally perverted that he leads an attack against them to steal their last bit of money, poignantly kept in a sock" ("A Mother's" 43).

In spring 1838, about one and a half years after he was gone to London, Benjamin comes back home to ask for £300 from his father for his joint partnership in London. The following narratorial remark describing his old parents' impression of their son's change is intended to remind the reader that Benjamin has been possessed by the Demon: "they had too much fine instinct in their homely natures not to know, after a very few minutes had passed, that this was not a true prince" ("CB" 238). His Demon is the demon of covetousness.

Seeing his father's angry surprise at his reason for demanding so much money as £300, Benjamin begins to persuade him by calling him "sir," probably to demonstrate his humility,²⁴ only to provoke his father's indignation ("CB" 240-41). Finding it difficult to placate Nathan, Benjamin discloses his plan of emigration to "America, or India, or some colony where there would be an opening for a young man of spirit," as if to threaten his father. The narrator hints at the existence of the covetous demon in Benjamin's soul in her explanation that he "had reserved this proposition for his trump card, expecting by means of it to carry all before him" ("CB" 241). Sharps is right when he points out Benjamin's sinfulness in this scene by observing "To extract his father's hard-earned savings, he exploited parental affection by threatening to emigrate unless the money were forthcoming" (*O&I* 327). When Nathan begins to approve of his son's plan of emigration, "Benjamin set his teeth hard to keep in curses. It was well for poor Nathan

²⁴ Baker explains "Benjamin's use of the formal term 'sir' to his father reveals not only his alienation from his humble roots (the professional middle classes commonly employed such terms within the family), but also his lack of true affection for his father, and the emptiness of his own words" ("Introd." xiv).

he did not look round then, and see the look his son gave him" ("CB" 241). For, Benjamin's real objective for this suggestion is not the emigration for finding an honest occupation, but his father's money for achieving his judicial but speculative ambition in London. This narratorial depiction of his moral corruption is another piece of evidence that Benjamin is possessed by the demon of covetousness.²⁵

Benjamin's demonic avarice becomes unmitigated when Nathan tells him his plan of preparing £200, instead of the requested £300. Listening to his talk, "Benjamin gave a sharp glance at his father, to see if he was telling the truth; and,

²⁵ One of the leading Unitarian minister James Martineau introduces a Jewish distinction among demons, devils, and Satan ("Lecture XI," UD 26-27). Demons are "the souls of the wicked dead," and it is "these only" that are "supposed to possess and afflict the bodies of the living." Devils are "guilty angels," and has "no agency assigned to them on earth, being kept in durance within the prisons of the unseen world." The chief of the former is Beelzebub, "of the latter, Satan." Probably the Devil is "the ruler of all the powers of evil, whether human or angelic," while, "unlike his incarcerated compeers," Satan is "permitted to be at large, and to practice his arts against mankind." In the gospels, evils ascribed to Satan are not the same as those to Beelzebub and his demons: "Satan, and he only, was the moral seducer: and the physical calamities proceeding from him were only natural and intelligible diseases, regular enough to fall under the cognizance of science. The demons had, on the contrary, no concern with the conscience; and occasioned only the irregular and apparently preternatural maladies, which science deserted and left to the tender mercies of superstition;—of which epilepsy and insanity are the most remarkable examples." In short, Satan or the Devil is the cause of both moral temptation and natural diseases, while demons that of preternatural maladies only. The scriptural distinction among the three beings, however, is confusing. The devil is called Beelzebub "the prince of the devils" (Matt. 12.24; Mark 3.22) or "Beelzebub the chief of the devils" (Luke 11.15), and "Satan" (Rev. 12.9) as well; there appears no reference to "demon" in the Bible, but the word is a Greek equivalent to devil ("devil" in "Bible Dictionary"). Concerning his inquiry into the "primary source of moral evil" ("Lecture XI," UD 33), Revd Martineau simply stresses the importance of continuous fighting against the fiend—since "God and evil are everlasting foes" ("Lecture XI," UD 34), "we are summoned to enter the field of moral conflict, to stir up the noble courage of our hearts, and in the Lord's own might, do battle with the confederate fiends of guilt and woe" ("Lecture XI," UD 55)—, and after all refrains from giving a clear answer to the origin of the evil, because "All the ingenuities of logic and of language, leave it a mystery still: and it is *better* to stand within the darkness in the quietude of faith, than vainly to search for its margin in the restlessness of knowledge" ("Lecture XI," UD 51). This is another example of Unitarian ambiguity about the scriptural teaching—in this case, about the satanic existence. Scripture teaches us the coming of the wicked or lawless one is "after the working of Satan" (2 Thess. 2.9), repeatedly warns us against satanic temptation (1 Cor. 7.5; 2 Cor. 2.10-11; 1 Tim. 5.14-15), and advises us to abstain from evil (Ps. 97.10; Rom 12.9; 1 Thess. 5.22). Revd Martineau's reference to "any mystic horror" as from "the lash of demons" implies that the existence of the Demon or Satan was acknowledged even by Unitarians ("Lecture VI," UD 5; emphasis added), or was a topic of theological debate at least. At the same time, he is rather sceptical about the Trinitarian idea that it is "*more reasonable* to admit the existence of two almighty and independent Beings, the one eternally good, the other eternally evil," insisting that "it yet remains to be explained . . . how the power of *right* moral choice can be the gift of God, and that of *wrong* moral choice of a Demon" ("Notes to Lecture VI," UD 78). He shows his understanding about some apostles' belief in Satan's "real existence and agency of such beings" ("Lecture XI," UD 15), but is too cautious "to have recourse to metaphysical abstraction" ("Notes to Lecture VI," UD 79).

that a suspicion of the old man, his father, had entered into the son's head, tells enough of his own character" ("CB" 242). The narrator's criticism of Benjamin's suspicion of his tender-hearted father is her implication of his wickedness, or his soul being possessed by the demon of covetousness. This narratorial disparagement of the prodigal son is followed by a stark contrast between Benjamin's deceitful action and Nathan's simple-minded trust in his son by which spotlighted is the former's Satanic character. The bills actually altered on purpose by Benjamin to "cover other and less creditable expenses" are considered by well-wishing Nathan as the result of his son's careless payment "above the usual price for the articles he had purchased," because "the simple old farmer . . . had still much faith left in him for his boy" ("CB" 243). Benjamin finally agrees "to receive the two hundred, and promised to employ it to the best advantage in setting himself up in business," but after "some hesitation" ("CB" 243). Even though being given £200 kept in his father's bank, the young man still has "a strange hankering after the additional fifteen pounds that was left to accumulate" in his father's stocking, which he considers "was his . . . as heir to his father": he "thinks more of this fifteen pounds that he was not to have than of all the hardly-earned and humbly-saved two hundred that he was to come into possession of" ("CB" 243). Unaware of his son's hidden avarice, the father, "so generous and affectionate at heart," feels satisfaction in having helped Benjamin and his fiancée Bessy become happy "by the sacrifice of the greater part of his property" ("CB" 243). "The very fact of having trusted his son so largely," continues the narrator, "seemed to make Benjamin more worthy of trust in his father's estimation" ("CB" 243). "About a year after" his return to London, nonetheless, the greedy son sends Nathan a note for demanding "the remainder of his father's saving, whether in the stocking or the

bank" ("CB" 246). About eight or so years later ("CB" 255), he breaks into his house to steal his father's savings in "his stocking" ("CB" 269).

The above survey of a contrast between Benjamin's persistent avarice and Nathan's persevering trust in his goodness, or an irony of the father's trust in the untrustworthy son, brings to light not merely Benjamin's covetousness and his merciless disloyalty to his father—violation of the tenth and eighth Commandments, but also Gaskell's implication that Benjamin is demon-possessed. In addition, the old honest farmer Nathan's simple faith in Benjamin's goodness makes an invaluable contribution to the increase of the painfulness of his confession of his treasured son's attempted murder of his mother in "the final scene of this domestic tragedy, the most tragic episode in all Mrs. Gaskell's stories" (A. W. Ward 7: xxv), where "the unspeakable 'sharpness' of the anguish caused by the thanklessness of a wicked son" is "worked out with far stronger emotional force" (Ward 7: xxvi).

This trial scene provides "genuine pathos" (Bacigalupo 121), "pitiful suspense" (Ward 7: xxv), and "powerful human drama" (Bacigalupo 121), as well as intensifies "the sensational aspects of the crime" (Bacigalupo 122). Gaskell's device of making Hester blind is meant for increasing the dramatic effect of the catastrophic scene. There appear many references to her blindness as the story approaches the end: for instance, Benjamin's mother is "losing her eyesight" ("CB" 250), "her increasing loss of sight unfitted her" ("CB" 251), "the rapid approach of total blindness. . . . Hester's blind way of feeling about for her husband" ("CB" 265), Bessy's "aunt's face looked blankly up into his [Nathan's], tears slowly running down from her sightless eyes" ("CB" 266), "evidently blind" ("CB" 268), and "a presence she could not see" ("CB" 269). The device is effective to highlight the

cruelty of Benjamin as a virtual assailant of such a weak old mother, to draw the reader's sympathy towards her, and thus to spotlight the contrast between goodness of the Huntroyds' family and wickedness of Benjamin.

Some narratorial references to Benjamin's inborn goodness should verify the validity of our scriptural reading of Benjamin as being possessed by the evil spirit, or the reading of the story from the viewpoint of the Plan of Salvation. (a) First, for Bessy, her cousin is "so soft-spoken, so handsome, so kind" ("CB" 230). (b) Second, although his view of his son might be tinted with naivety, Nathan stresses that he has lost the essential goodness of his spirit because of his association with "evil lads": "He were a good chap till he knowed them—a good chap till he knowed them" ("CB" 234). (c) Third, in Bessy's recollection, Benjamin remains as "the innocent child, the spirited lad, the handsome, dashing young man" ("CB" 256). (d) Fourth, in one sense, Benjamin's covetousness is caused not by his desire for wealth, but by his ambition "to pursue a career in the law" (Baker, "Introd." xi) in London ("CB" 232, 239). Ambition itself may not necessarily be morally wrong as Bessy insists in defence for her fiancé: "I dunnot see harm in it. . . . It's fitting for a young man to go abroad and see the world afore he settles down" ("CB" 232). In view of Christian ethics, making efforts to achieve ambitions is not always wrong but rather recommended: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Pet. 1.10). Benjamin's fault is his frailty of will or spirit which easily acquiesces to the temptation of the diabolic enemy. (e) Lastly, the lifting-up of the "wooden latch of the door" and its fall into the "proper place" ("CB" 254) Bessy sees during the Bible-reading hour at the burglary night could be interpreted as betokening his spirit's goodness. Since no clear reason for his action is stated in the text, this

movement of the latch might be simply the narrator's device to signal the occurrence of some sinister event or Benjamin's seeking to avoid detection. Nevertheless, if it implied his hesitation to intrude the house while his parents and cousin are reading Scriptures, it could be construed as another sign of his having goodness at heart.

Saracino observes that Benjamin is an example for investigating "the innate dual nature of the human being," i.e. "the divided self" between "good and evil" ("Interpreting" 115). According to the Plan of Salvation, a human being's innate nature is not dual, but fundamentally singular—virtuous, kind, and innocent, as "we are the children of God" (Rom. 8.16); notwithstanding, because of the weakness of our soul, we are likely to be tempted by the Devil, and thus appear to have dual nature—good and evil. Unitarians believe in human beings' original virtue (Chryssides 40), or "the natural goodness of man" (Lansbury, *Social Crisis* 13). Despite her "belief in the fundamental goodness of human nature" (Nectoux 61), Gaskell draws such a wicked character as Benjamin Huntroyd. This shift of her interest may betoken her artistic development; yet, viewed in terms of the parable of the Prodigal Son and the creed of the Plan of Salvation, it hardly betokens the decrease in her Christian faith. Benjamin is another pattern of the prodigal whose meaning should become clearer when studied from the angle of the scriptural elements in the divine scheme. Melnyk states Gaskell's fiction narrates "the redemptive power of sympathy and compassion that, in her religious tradition, derive ultimately from divine sources" (*Victorian Religion* 114). By incorporating a few allusions to the good nature of vicious Benjamin in the story, does not Gaskell intimate the possibility of his salvation through the redemptive power of the sympathetic and compassionate Huntroyd family? Revealed are his family's constant

attempt to trust goodness in the prodigal and their religious piety set in sharp contrast to his impiety, which allegorically signify God's mercy for Benjamin and His deep sympathy for pious Nathan, Hester, and Bessy, who suffer many sorrows because of their unwavering faith in God. Unitarians "believe that . . . even for the guiltiest there may be processes of redemption; and that the stained spirit may be cleansed as by fire" (Thom, "Lecture I," *UD* 35). Because they teach "that men and women have essential goodness within themselves, they have consistently rejected notions of eternal punishment" (Chryssides 41).

3.5.3. Satan vs God

This section examines Benjamin's self-centredness—another sign of his spirit being captured by the Devil²⁶—and God's protection of the innocent Huntroyds' family.

One of the most typical examples of Benjamin's self-seeking behaviour is found in his insincerity in love. He rules "imperiously" over his fiancée Bessy Rose's heart "from the time she first set eyes on him" ("CB" 230), and uses her simply as a tool for fulfilling his desire: "absent from her, he looked upon her rather as a good wedge, to be driven into his parents' favour on his behalf" ("CB" 242). His love for her is calculating and shallow, or simply the means "to wheedle

²⁶ Revd Martineau elucidates the Jewish distinction between demons and devils. Demons are "the souls of the wicked dead," supposed "to possess and afflict the bodies of the living" ("Lecture XI," *UD* 26), occasion "the irregular and apparently preternatural maladies, which science deserted and left to the tender mercies of superstition," and have "no concern with the conscience" ("Lecture XI," *UD* 27). On the other hand, devils are "guilty angels," with "no agency assigned to them on earth, being kept in durance within the prisons of the unseen world" ("Lecture XII," *UD* 26). "Unlike his incarcerated compeers," i.e. devils, Satan their chief is "permitted to be at large, and to practise his arts against mankind," and continues "his malignity at least until the Messiah's reign," which commences "with his dethronement" ("Lecture XI," *UD* 26). Satan, also called the Devil, is "believed to be the ruler of all the powers of evil, whether human or angelic" ("Lecture XI," *UD* 26); "the physical calamities proceeding" from "the moral seducer" are "only natural and intelligible diseases, regular enough to fall under the cognizance of science" ("Lecture XI," *UD* 27). Ghosts and hauntings are caused by evil spirits under Satan's control: "Ghosts are demons in disguise" (Hephzibah Cristly, "Beware"). Gaskell's interest in such evil spirits as ghosts, demons, devils, and Satan comes from her belief "in the existence of the spirit world" (Shelston, "Exploring" 17), an element of the pre-mortal world prescribed in the Plan of Salvation.

gold from his parents” (Sharps, *O&I* 327): “Benjamin had discovered that the way to cajole his parents out of money for every indulgence he fancied, was to pretend to forward their innocent scheme, and make love to his pretty cousin Bessy Rose” (“CB” 231).

Benjamin’s heartless egotism implied in “that subdued voice of the hidden robber” (“CB” 264)—“Bessy, Bessy! for God’s sake, let me out” (“CB” 260)—is so dreadful that his cousin almost wishes that her uncle and aunt, “and she too, might have just lain down to their rest in the churchyard—so cruel did life seem to her” (“CB” 264). When he burgles his own house with two other men, he deceives their parents by saying “Father, mother I’m here, starving i’ the cold—wunnot yo’ get up and let me in?” (“CB” 268), hiding his true reason for returning to the house is to find out his father’s stocking which contains his savings (“CB” 269). His cruellest action among those depicted in the text would be his shout to kill his own mother, which is revealed in his father’s painful testimony in the penultimate paragraph of this story: “my son, my only child . . . shouted out for to hold th’ old woman’s throat if she did na stop her noise” (“CB” 270). Benjamin’s brutal self-centredness becomes explicit when it is disclosed that he pleads Bessy to let him escape out of the house soon after this inhumane shout.

Benjamin’s selfishness is implied also in the narrator’s doubts about the plausibility of his story of the London partnership. Hester is willing enough to part with savings for her son, but “how such a sum could be necessary, was a puzzle” (“CB” 236). Even Nathan has no means to ascertain its credibility: “he knew nothing of all this [the truth of the plausible details by which his son bore out the story of the offered partnership], and acted in the way which satisfied his anxiety best”

("CB" 245). Sharps states that Benjamin's sinfulness lies in "his treatment of those who had done most for him" (*O&I* 327).

Styler views the cause of Benjamin's monstrous character resides in his "misguided or irresponsible" parents: "the actions of parents have profound consequences on their children's future happiness, and on their moral character" ("Monstrous" 474). Our biblical analysis of Benjamin's sins, however, endorses the Unitarian "principle of individual moral responsibility . . . by which a person should be judged only according to their own actions" (Styler, "Monstrous" 474). This principle is in a close connection with the Unitarian denial of "the doctrine of original sin" (Shelston, "Boundaries" 21; Carroll 9, 63; Lansbury, *Social Crisis* 12; Nectoux 13, 81; Thom, "Lecture I," *UD* 36; ---, "Lecture VII," *UD* 61), which proclaims that human beings do not inherit the sin of Adam and Eve (Chapple, "Unitarian" 165), i.e. they are "free from evil from birth" (Carroll 9), and responsible for their own sin. Championing this Unitarian notion that the responsibility for sin lies with individuals not with their ancestors, Martineau observes that "the habit of tracing sin beyond the individual will to a progenitor" spreads "confusion over the moral perceptions, by mystifying the nature of guilt, and destroying that feeling of its personal character and identity which belongs to the Christian sentiment of responsibility" ("Lecture XI," *UD* 40).

Gaskell's Unitarian view that the responsibility for moral corruption rests with Benjamin himself is hinted at in Nathan's motives for providing his son with the opportunity for education. One of the chief reasons for Benjamin's moral decline is presumed to be his attendance at a corrupt grammar-school in the neighbouring town Highminster, where the pupils learned not only "vice" but also "deceit" ("CB" 230). Bacigalupo observes, "The boy, 'who might have been an earl's

son for grace and beauty' . . . is sent to school, where he learns to assume airs and to express contempt for his parents' plain manners" (118). The narrator gives five reasons for the Huntroyds' choice of such a school for their precious son. First, neither of them "knew much of learning"; second, they "could not . . . part with their darling to a boarding-school"; third, yet they thought "some schooling he must have"; fourth, many of their neighbours' sons, including their Squire's son, attended this school; and fifth, the pupils' deceitfulness made Nathan and Hester fail to notice the true state of the school's moral distortion sooner ("CB" 230). All reasons explain the inevitability of the situation, and seem to be inserted to explicate the couple's simple honesty and trust in God's guidance rather than to blame them for serious negligence.

It is hinted at three times at least that even the burglars' attack on Nab-End Farm, one of the crucial scenes in the story, takes place under the protection of God. (a) First, a detailed description of the Huntroyd family's nightly reading of a Bible chapter is inserted immediately before the start of the burglars' attempt of intrusion: "the very fact of opening the book seemed to soothe those old bereaved parents; for it made them feel quiet and safe in the presence of God, and took them out of the cares and troubles of this world into that futurity which, however dim and vague, was to their faithful hearts as a sure and certain rest" ("CB" 254). The narratorial reference to the "futurity" which is "to their faithful hearts . . . a sure and certain rest" not only signifies the couple's firm belief in the next world, but also implies their doubtless salvation after death. In addition to the last sentence of this text "But the broken-hearted go Home, to be comforted of God," which is interpreted as suggesting the salvation of the "old bereaved parents" ("CB" 254) by Baker ("Introd." x, lii), this narratorial reference also hints at the presumable

fulfilment of their salvation. The narrator closes this scene of Heavenly comfort, inserted prior to the coming danger, by stressing the providential care for the truthful family: “this little quiet pause, I say, was grateful and soothing to this household” (“CB” 254). (b) Second, the heartless and painful assault occurs when John Kirkby’s cow falls ill unexpectedly at that night. Thus, “two defenders” (“CB” 259), the neighbouring farmer and the vet, are brought into the central stage to protect Bessy, who observes, “What a blessing that John Kirkby’s cow was sick, for there were several men watching with him!” (“CB” 257). (c) Third, this providential protection is referred to by John Kirkby as well in his talk to Bessy: “Whatten a marcy it were as she were sick this very night! Yon two chaps ’ud ha’ made short work on’t, if yo’ hadna fetched us in” (“CB” 257). This setting behind the terrifying incident which brings to light Gaskell’s device for depicting the Huntroyd family as guarded by the Heavenly Father betokens the author’s protection of the broken-hearted three as well as her devout faith in God.

3.6. Conclusion

Some critics consider it is the Huntroyd couple’s indulgence which makes their son Benjamin an immoral brute.²⁷ Our Plan of Salvation analysis of the text, in contrast, reveals that “the product of parental indulgence” (Styler, “The Problem” 36) is surrounded by the warm-hearted family who all hold Christian integrity, and hence that it is Benjamin’s moral weakness which makes himself a

²⁷ Examples include “Gaskell . . . presents parents who are deeply loving, but who unintentionally ruin their son because their love is not governed by rational principle. They fail to train his moral sentiments correctly” (Styler, “Monstrous” 476), “[What] the parents do not realise is this is the consequence of his upbringing: it is they who have unwittingly created this monster. The tale presents a hard lesson in parental responsibility—that affection is not enough, and indeed that affection ungoverned by principle can be dangerous” (Styler, “Monstrous” 479), and “Forgiveness should be unconditional, but if it is granted without any discussion, or without actions being taken to redress deviant behaviours, then oftentimes the wrong-doer will not redeem himself and possibly will turn into evil purposes. When this happens, forgiveness ceases to be a strength, something so noble and positive can then turn destructive” (Saracino, “Interpreting” 114-15; Nectoux 70).

monster. Although Saracino's succinct summary of the plot quoted below is convincing in spotlighting the Huntroyd family's Christian rectitude including selfless devotion to Benjamin, it is a disputable question whether the parents are "unwisely" ignorant of "the truth about their son." As has been examined above, the couple do notice it—for instance, Nathan is informed of his son's actual situation after visiting the Highminster attorney Mr Lawson ("CB" 234), and tells "sad reports about his only child" to his wife ("CB" 246). The point to note is that, even so, they try to trust in his goodness in accordance with their devout faith in God ("CB" 243).²⁸ The next problem to be considered is what is the meaning of this authorial design—Benjamin's evilness with the ample references to his family's infinite compassion as its background.

According to Scriptures, even sinners are given chances of repentance, redemption, and resurrection, as written in the verses like "I [Christ] am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9.13), "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1.15), and "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15.22). However, Benjamin breaks three Commandments at least out of ten. The narrator makes no mention as to whether even such a brute as Benjamin, who "has no basic goodness or redeeming features" (Baker, "Introd." xx), could be saved or not, and leaves the judgement upon the reader's discretion.

²⁸ The situation is succinctly summarized by Saracino. "'The Crooked Branch' is a story of parents who unwisely ignore what they know to be the truth about their son, quietly forgiving, and never speaking ill of him to anyone. Hester and Nathan (along with their niece, Bessy) sacrifice their savings and well being for the irresponsible son, only to be most cruelly betrayed by him in return. Still, no one in the family desires revenge or punishment for Benjamin. They protect him from the law as far as they can, and it is only under duress that they finally testify at his trial" ("Interpreting" 113-14).

On the other hand, the narrator intimates the salvation of Hester, and probably Nathan and Bessy as well, at the very end of the story: "But the broken-hearted go Home, to be comforted of God" ("CB" 270). This sentence should probably be interpreted as referring to the salvation of the broken-hearted three, i.e. Nathan, Hester, and Bessy in Heaven, although it could be interpreted as referring to Hester's salvation only since it follows the penultimate sentence stating that she is "on her death-bed" ("CB" 270). Actually, the narrator has been sympathetic towards them from the start of the story. A lot of references to their moral uprightness, including their patient and enduring affection for Benjamin, are inserted, as we have seen above. Nathan, Hester, and Bessy are faithful adherers to the Apostle Paul's teaching: "avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. . . . Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12.19, 21).

For devout Christians, faith and morality are inseparable, since faith in God is nurtured by the truth of His teachings including those concerning thoughts and actions of moral righteousness. In a letter to her sister-in-law Elizabeth Holland dated early April 1859, Gaskell confesses that she is an adherer to Christ's teaching of the moral principle "Judge not others" (Matt. 7.1-2; Luke 6.37), by which she shows her religious faith: "I am more and more convinced that where every possible individual circumstance varies so completely all one can do is to judge for oneself and take especial care not to judge other[s] or for others. . . . I strive more and more against deciding whether another person is doing right or wrong" (*Letters* 548-49). Her consistency in this teaching is expressed in her letter to George Eliot dated 10 November of the same year as well in which she quotes this advice of

Christ: “I wish you *were* Mrs Lewes. However that can’t be helped, as far as I can see, and one must not judge others” (*Letters* 592).

In conclusion, the focus of this prodigal story is placed on the depiction of the stark contrast between the Christian integrity of the prodigal’s family and the cruel inhumanity of the prodigal himself. This device is probably intended to raise the reader’s empathy towards the broken-hearted three, and instigate the reader’s wonder why they are not rewarded for their patient and constant love for the profligate, and what will become of such a merciless and self-centred profligate as Benjamin. The narratorial comment inserted at the very end of the tale, “the broken-hearted go Home, to be comforted of God” (“CB” 270), is short, but pregnant with meaning, since it is the author’s conclusion of the questions posed in her tale. The mortal life is sometimes very harsh for those who are pure at heart, such as the Huntroyd couple and their niece. They may not necessarily be rewarded for their goodness and integrity in this world.²⁹ For some people, Satan’s power is so strong as to weaken their moral judgement concerning good and evil. Benjamin is created as a representation of such human beings as yield to satanic temptations—Gaskell’s remark on “mutual attraction” between men and women “of which Satan is the originator” (*Letters* 808) is one of the allusions to her belief in Satan. Benjamin is an example of the prodigal child who shows no repentance. Even though, those who have suffered for their faith in God in the present world should no doubt be rewarded in the next world (1 Pet. 4.12-13; Matt. 5.10-12)—this is what is meant in the closing sentence. Baker expresses dissatisfaction about this “religious consolation” and calls it “an inadequate substitute” (“Intro.” xvi): “Despite the

²⁹ The preacher the son of David writes, “All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just *man* that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth *his life* in his wickedness” (Eccel. 7.15)

promotion throughout of spiritual or Christian values over materialism and selfishness, and the rather perfunctory promise of heavenly consolation at the end, we are left with a bleak vision of human nature. . . . Gaskell's story ends on a note of pain and suffering" ("Introd." lxv). If Baker's impression is an echo of many other readers', it is the badge of Gaskell's success in her description of the dramatic contrast between the Huntroyd family's "spiritual or Christian values" and Benjamin's "materialism and selfishness." Styler's reading of "The Crooked Branch" includes a sharp criticism of the Huntroyd family that the tale's lesson is the moral failure of the family's "thoughtless imitation of social norms" ("The Problem" 38), or the "sin of omission" of its independent thinking, i.e. its "ignorant adoption of the ethics of privilege" ("The Problem" 39). Craik's reading focuses on the dramatic contrast between the son and his family: Gaskell explores "the fact of human wickedness and the inescapable pain it must cause to all who are bound by love" (*EG* 144; emphasis added). The reading of the story in terms of the parable of the Prodigal Son and the creed of the Plan of Salvation reveals (a) the author's interest in the parable, (b) Benjamin as an impenitent prodigal tempted by Satan, (c) goodness of the spirit of Nathan, Hester, and Bessy as the children of God, (d) the author's emphasis on the wide divergence in moral sense between the two parties, and (e) the question as to the possibility of their redemption. The narrator's conclusive remark, which has a close affinity with the verses in Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5.4) and "Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5.7), is the answer to this question. The "Home" beginning with the capital letter "H" signifies the home in heaven where the broken-hearted, i.e. Hester, her husband, and her niece, will be healed by God. There is no mention of the future

of Benjamin in the weighty clause, which embodies three possibilities of interpretation at least. First, it is too obvious for him to be confirmed as unsaved; second, it is unknown even to the narrator; or third, it is left on the reader's discretion. Whichever the correct answer may be, this ending manifests Gaskell's Christianity, or her belief in fundamental goodness of human spirit, as it leaves room for interpreting the possibility of Benjamin's future rehabilitation and his redemption.

CHAPTER 4 "CROWLEY CASTLE": REPENTANT UNREWARDED?

4.1. Chronology as Introduction

Gaskell's third short story which contains a prodigal as one of the key characters is "Crowley Castle" (1863), which first appeared as "How the First Floor Went to Crowley Caste," the second chapter of the chain story *Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings*, in the Extra Christmas number of *All the Year Around*, dated "3 Christmas 1863" (Dickens, *AYR* 10: 12-25; *P&C* 4: 337; Suzanne Lewis xxiv). Theresa Crowley is unique among Gaskell's prodigals in that few narratorial implications of her earthly redemption is inserted into the text despite her sincerity in repentance of sin. Lizzie Leigh is a weeping penitent who is given plenty of implication of her earthly redemption. For Benjamin Huntroyd, who shows no sign of repentance, no narratorial implication of his earthly salvation is provided in "The Crooked Branch." The variety of descriptions of a prodigal betokens the advance of Gaskell's artistic technique from the unwavering suggestion of divine love for sinners to its modest suggestion, or from the straight appeal to the reader's compassion to the full trust in his/her discretion.

Before starting the analysis of the tale in terms of the parable of the Prodigal Son and the creed of the Plan of Salvation, a comprehensive chronology of the events in the storyline shall be created for the clearer and deeper understanding of the textual contents, especially because the narrator's intention to write a story of recording a chain of historical events is conspicuous on account of the following three reasons. First, while "Lizzie Leigh" and "The Crooked Branch" are narrated along the axis of time, "Crowley Castle" is done by looking back on the course of events which took place about from 100 to 70 years ago (*P&C* 339). Second, while

there appears only one reference to the concrete historical year both in “Lizzie Leigh”—“1836” (“LL” 3)—and in “The Crooked Branch”—“Not many years after the beginning of this century” (“CB” 227), i.e. the 19th-century—, there appear three historical time setters in “Crowley Castle”—“nearly a century,” “1772,” and “1756” (*P&C* 339). The increase of references to specific years indicates the narrator’s conscious attempt to clarify the accurate years of the events in her tale. Third, as for the time span treated in each short story, “Lizzie Leigh” describes what happens approximately for 23 years—James and Anne Lizzie are “two-and-twenty years” man and wife (“LL” 3) and Lizzie is found within “a twelvemonth” after her father’s death (“LL” 8)—, but a course of main events in the story—from Anne’s search for Lizzie to the reunion between them—occur within a year or so. “The Crooked Branch,” which deals with approximately 53 years, centres on a series of events from Nathan’s marriage with Hester to the disclosure of their only son’s cruelty at the assize court whose time span is about 33 years (See Table 3). Although the period of time treated in “Crowley Castle” is nearly 120 years, the focal point is put on approximately 24 years when a sequence of events take place from the protagonist and prodigal Theresa’s birth in 1752 to her separation from her husband Duke and his child in 1776 (See Table 4 for the chronology and Fig. 11 for characters’ correlation). The difference in the time span highlighted in each story—one year out of 23 years in “Lizzie Leigh,” 33 years out of 53 years in “The Crooked Branch,” and 24 years out of 120 years in “Crowley Castle”—also hints at the narrator’s purpose to set the third story in the historical context. Accordingly, creation of a detailed chronology for “Crowley Castle” should help us grasp the deeper meaning of the tale.

Our careful examination of time data illuminates that the main focus of the story is put on the events which take place during 21 years from 1756 to 1776. “Seventy years ago” in the narratorial explanation about “a scrap of glass yet lingering in what was the window of the great drawing-room not above seventy years ago” (P&C 4: 339) she sees in 1862 in the introductory section probably means the events referred to in the concluding paragraph, including Duke’s return to England and the disposal of the castle to a stranger (P&C 4: 365), occurred “seventy years ago,” that is, around 1792. The main focus of the tale is put on the events which take place during ten years from 1767 to 1776, when Theresa is about 15 to 24 years old, Bessy about of the same age as she is only six months older than her old friend, and Duke about 23 to 32, while Victorine, Sir Mark, and Bessy’s mother Madam Hawtrey, are in their parents’ generation. The outcome of our analysis is shown in Table 4.³⁰ Fig. 13, which illustrates the interaction of the five main characters, indicates Theresa is most active throughout the plot, followed by Victorine, Duke, and Bessy. This kind of data concerning characters’ frequency of appearance may not necessarily be a reliable cipher for narrative significance, but seems to give us a hint for identifying the author’s design for her fiction from a different angle, or rather to offer some objective evidence to validate critics’ insightful reading of the text. Indeed, Fig. 12 provides a hint for explaining the reason for the diversity of critics’ reading regarding the central character in “Lizzie Leigh.”

³⁰ Our investigation discloses that Theresa appears on more than 90.6% of the total pages, followed by Duke 68.86%, Victorine 57.54%, Bessy 50.94%, and Sir Mark 46.22%. It also reveals that approximately 57.5% of the total pages are given to the actions in Crowley Caste, 21.7% in Paris, and 6.6% in London.

4.2. Salvation of Characters

This section analyses the five main characters—Theresa, Victorine, Duke, Bessy, and Sir Mark—principally from the perspective of the Christian creed of the Plan of Salvation.

4.2.1. Theresa

Theresa Crowley is a new type of a prodigal who is remorseful but given no hint for being saved. Lizzie Leigh is a penitent who has her earthly as well as heavenly redemption intimated. Benjamin Huntroyd is a covetous and selfish sinner who has no hint for redemption given. If Gaskell believes in the Plan of Salvation, including the concepts of God's forgiveness for all sinners and of His afflictions being given us for the purification of our souls, her prodigals should be given a chance for rehabilitation and salvation. If no allusion to such a chance is made in her stories, it is because of her artistic technique of appealing to her readers' compassion, or their spirits' goodness. This section clarifies this technique mainly by tracing Theresa's change from an arrogant and proud person to a modest, penitent, and morally-better person through trials and tribulations in her life.

At first, she is introduced as a "wilful" little creature with a full pretty "pouting passionate" mouth, made "more wayward" by her father's indulgence (P&C 4: 340). One of the typical examples of young Theresa's arrogance is found in her response to Duke's admonition about her "tyrannising over" (P&C 4: 341) Bessy, who is "six months older" (P&C 4: 343) than she is, during their joint lessons. "The girl opened her great grey eyes in surprise. She to blame!"—her insolence is condensed into this short narratorial observation of her behaviour (P&C 4: 341). Since her companion joins her lessons for free, it might be natural in a sense for Theresa to regard the pastor's daughter as her "maid" (P&C 4: 341). Explaining the cause

of her arrogance, Maureen Teresa Reddy observes, "As a young girl, Theresa is very strong-willed, tyrannizing over those around her. Like many beautiful girls, Theresa finds herself pampered and deferred to, and imagines from this that she has more power over her own life than she actually does" (91). To note, notwithstanding, the narrator's comment on her goodness are inserted immediately after and before this scene: "The moment Theresa had said this, she could have bitten her tongue out for the meanness and rancour of the speech," and, sensitive enough to notice "pain and disappointment . . . expressed on Duke's face," she, "in another moment . . . would have spoken out her self-reproach" (P&C 4: 341). She is actually "of a generous nature when not put out of the way" (P&C 4: 341). In addition, soon after this discord, Theresa pays a visit to Bessy's parsonage to apologize for her impoliteness: "Bessy, I behaved very crossly to you; I had no business to have spoken to you as I did" (P&C 4: 342). Bessy's unspoken forgiveness given immediately after this apology is expressed in her "stealing her brown soil-stained little hand into the young lady's soft white one, and looking up at her with loving brown eyes" (P&C 4: 342). Although being short, this episode is pregnant with meaning. Theresa not only follows the underlying pattern in the parable of the Prodigal Son—committing sin, feeling repentance, and being forgiven—, but also mirrors one of the key concepts of the Plan of Salvation—fundamental goodness of the human spirit. Nectoux, highlighting Gaskell's "staunch trust in humankind," explains this scriptural interpretation of her characters from a secular viewpoint: her "belief in the fundamental goodness of human nature is obvious. Many of her characters display attributes of virtue, decency, and generosity, which are manifested in their ability to forgive the mistakes and injuries that others inflict upon them, or that they, themselves, inflict upon others. . . . most characters are depicted as needing

redemption, either through their ability to forgive or to accept the forgiveness of others" (*Selected* 61).

Theresa's innocence is depicted in parallel with her superciliousness especially in her behaviours towards Duke when she thinks of him as her childhood fiancé. Wondering if her father revealed his wish for their match to "his handsome nephew" (P&C 4: 345), Theresa becomes "rude . . . disagreeable" (P&C 4: 343), "wilful," rejects Duke's advice and information (P&C 4: 344), bursts into "a passion of tears" (P&C 4: 344), and refuses to give him a "farewell kiss" (P&C 4: 344). These behaviours of impoliteness are not caused by her superciliousness only, but also by her maiden shyness: the query above "made her cheeks burn; and, on days when the suspicion had been brought by any chance prominently before her mind, she was especially rude and disagreeable to Duke" (P&C 4: 343).

Theresa's childhood innocence is taken away from her good soul during her three-month luxurious life in fashionable Paris. A glimpse of her altered life is provided in the following citation from the scene: "Theresa's credit at her dress-maker's was unlimited, her indulgent father was charmed with all she did and said. . . . to a rich and beautiful young lady, masters were wonderfully complaisant, and with them as with all the world, she did what she pleased" (P&C 4: 346). Among the graphic depictions of her luxurious life in such lavish Parisian society is hidden the narrator's implied warning against the degradation of Theresa's soul, since they remind us of Jesus's teaching that "a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19.23) and the Apostle Paul's recommendation for women to "adorn themselves in modest apparel" (1 Tim. 2.9). Actually, there are a few passages in the Paris scene which foreshadow Theresa's moral decline and subsequent unhappy marriage. For example, "It was a little intoxicating for a girl

brought up in the solitude of an English village, to have so many worshippers at her feet all at once, in the great gay city; and the inbred coquetry of her nature came out, adding to her outward grace, if taking away from the purity and dignity of her character” (P&C 4: 346). From an over-softness of expression of Adolphe the handsome Count de Grange, Theresa’s seducer, “the tiger was occasionally seen to peep forth” (P&C 4: 346). Her father hears displeasing rumours of the conducts (P&C 4: 346) of this “dissolute Adonis [the beautiful youth beloved of Venus, hence any beautiful young man (“Notes,” P&C 4: 494)] of the Paris saloons” (P&C 4: 347). The count’s “great possessions in Province” is actually “mortgaged,” his “ancient lineage . . . disgraced” (P&C 4: 347). He is “one of the most disreputable” of the French nobility, “a gambler and a reprobate” (P&C 4: 348). Theresa’s resentment against her childhood fiancé after knowing his decline of her father’s request for his hasty coming to Paris to protect his daughter from “the various proposals from needy French noblemen” (P&C 4: 347) signifies her maiden pride as well as her detachment from Duke’s moral umbrella—another sign of the degradation of her soul—as he has been her moral guide since she was a little girl (P&C 4: 341). Theresa’s thoughtless pursuit of superficial happiness results in her immoral relationship, and ensuing “stolen marriage” (P&C 4: 348), with frivolous Adolphe which invites Duchess de G.’s accusation of “her cousin of perfidy and treason” (P&C 4: 348), the decline of her father’s health, and her own subsequent ordeals.

Webb states that the Unitarian quest for truth is the source of their agreement to the necessarian theory of the direct connection between cause and effect.

Insisting that “central in Unitarian thinking . . . is truth” (“The Gaskells” 163),³¹ Webb continues that the “consequences of violating truth are instances of the working of a larger principle, central to necessarian theology and, in Mrs Gaskell’s novels, the certain succession of cause and effect. . . . in the necessarian scheme, the inescapable effect of wrong formation of character or of deliberate or careless choice is suffering” (“The Gaskells” 164). This necessarian theology in Unitarianism is pointed out also by Patsy Stoneman as “Elizabeth Gaskell’s Unitarian concept of the rational responsibility of every individual for his or her own conduct” (*EG* 2nd ed. 37). According to the author’s husband and Unitarian minister William Gaskell, this suffering is given to us because “‘the plan of Divine Providence . . . for our good, has placed us under a severe and painful system of discipline’, as preparation for ‘a new and higher condition of being’” (Webb, “The Gaskells” 164). In a sense, our life on earth is a period of testing. Our mortal life is the period for training ourselves to become purified enough to meet our Heavenly Father again.³²

Gaskell prepares at least two hardships for Theresa to become a morally-better person: “her ill-starred marriage” (P&C 4: 352) and the death of Bessy (P&C 4: 359). Theresa’s first ordeal—her sexual transgression and subsequent wretched married life—could be the consequences of her vanity and inbred coquetry. Indeed, these sufferings make her spirit purified, or, in Reddy’s words, this “horrible marriage forces Theresa to mature” (92). One small change in her outward appearance

³¹ This view is shared by Chapple: “For Unitarians, the search for truth was a supreme value” (“Unitarian Dissent” 165). Webb introduces this feature of Unitarianism in other place too: “Unitarians . . . had repeatedly stressed the importance of pursuing truth” (“The Gaskells” 148).

³² As indicated in the Apostle Paul’s teaching “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons. . . . afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb. 12.6-11).

could be a sign of her cleansed spirit: Her “hair delicately powdered” (P&C 4: 346) in fashionable Paris becomes “all out of powder” (P&C 4: 357) when she welcomes Duke the successful politician at the gate of Crowley Castle almost two years (See Table 4) after her return home from Paris. Theresa often becomes too passionate to keep patience, retorts in a haughty way, loses her chastity to make a secret marriage, lives an unhappy wedded life, meets her dissipative and cruel husband’s accidental death, and returns home like the prodigal in the Bible. “None ever knew,” observes the narrator, “how much she had suffered since she had left home” (P&C 4: 354), i.e. during her two years in Paris. After two years of recuperation (See Table 4), Theresa recovers herself to assist Duke to achieve his political ambition.

Bessy’s death is the second great ordeal for Theresa to change her for a morally-better person. As for the ethical awakening of the protagonist’s spirit, “again overwhelmed with grief, or rather . . . remorse,” the narrator observes,

now that Bessy was gone, and buried out of sight, all her innocent virtues, all her feminine homeliness, came vividly into Theresa’s mind—not as wearisome, but as admirable, qualities of which she had been too blind to perceive the value. Bessy had been her own old companion too, in the happy days of childhood, and of innocence. (P&C 4: 359)

One of the best examples of Bessy’s goodness of spirit would be her thoughtfulness shown to Theresa when she speaks of “leaving Crowley Castle” for “some other home, soon after her father’s death”: the English couple Duke and Bessy urge “her to stay with them, Bessy saying, in the pure innocence of her heart, how glad” she would be “that, in the probably increasing cares of her nurse, Duke would have a companion so much to his mind” (P&C 4: 356). There was a clash of opinion

concerning Duke's "latent powers of his mind" (P&C 4: 356), or potential as a politician, between the two ladies, and Theresa was critical of Bessy's "feminine homeliness": "I cannot bear it—to see him cramped in by her narrow mind, to hear her weak selfish arguments, urged because she feels she would be out of place beside him" (P&C 4: 357). But now, Theresa comes to admire her "innocent virtues," regretting her too much blindness to take notice of their value (P&C 4: 359). The following instances of Theresa's politeness towards Bessy's mother are probably signs of her heartfelt apology and gratitude to her old companion. (a) First, although having "cared little for Madam Hawtrey's coldness" (P&C 4: 357) before her daughter's death, Theresa comes to behave towards her in "the strangely patient way" after Bessy's death: "Theresa submitted to her fantasies with even more docility than her own daughter would have done" (P&C 4: 359). (b) Theresa's kindness toward Madam Hawtrey is expressed also in her insistence of making it her only condition of continuing to stay at Crawley Castle after Bessy's death that Madam Hawtrey comes "to live under the same roof" with her (P&C 4: 359). (c) Theresa's devotion to Bessy's mother is implied again in her repeated entreaty to her to be her companion: "when once madam was at the castle, her own daughter had never been so dutiful, so humble a slave to her slightest fancy as was the proud Theresa now" (P&C 4: 362). (d) The fourth reference to Theresa's tenderness for Madam Hawtrey is found in Duke's observation of "his darling's virtues and charms" (P&C 4: 362): In addition to seeing "her tender affection for Mary" and feeling as if "he had never seen so lovely and tender a mother to another woman's child," Duke "wondered at her patience with Madam Hawtrey, remembering how often his own stock had been exhausted by his mother-in-law, and how the brilliant Theresa had formerly scouted and flouted at the vicar's wife" (P&C 4: 362).

Some readers might consider Theresa's good conduct towards Bessy's child and mother simply as the reflection of her regret for Victorine's overdosing Bessy to death which her old French nurse insists was done solely for her sake and service (P&C 4: 360, 363). Taking it into account that both her kindness toward Bessy's mother and her affection for Bessy's child have been delineated since before she hears from Victorine the actual situation of her childhood companion's death, however, we can probably confirm that Theresa's spiritual reform is true. The narrator's repeated insertion of her mental depression after knowing her role in her old nurse's fatal action—"Theresa drooped and drooped in this dreadful life. . . . the lady of the castle drooped and drooped" (P&C 4: 362)—, indicates her penitence is deep and sincere.

In the scene of Victorine's confession that her sins were committed only for her mistress and why they were done, the latter's innocence is repeatedly emphasized. Theresa asks her old nurse, "*What* is our joint secret? And what do you mean by its being a secret of blood?" (P&C 4: 360). Victorine's observation of her lady's face to see whether she has noticed the real meaning of her visit to the Italian chemist in Paris only reveals Theresa's look is "stern, but free and innocent" (P&C 4: 360). To her confession that it was to learn "the art of poisoning" solely for her lady's sake and service, Theresa blanches "to a deadly white" (P&C 4: 360). The old French *bonne*'s talk about her attempted murder of Adolphe reminds his widow of her woeful married life only to utter the words of repentance: "I was so wicked because I was so miserable; and now I am so happy, so inexpressibly happy, that—do let me try to make you happy too!" (P&C 4: 361). To Victorine's enigmatic allusion to her killing Bessy, Theresa answers, "I do not know what you mean!" (P&C 4: 361).

Tracing the protagonist's trials and tribulations repeatedly given by God—sexual sin, reckless marriage, widowhood in her 20s, death of her father, death of her old friend, unconscious involvement into her nurse's poisoning Bessy—her patient endurance of these ordeals, and her ensuing contrition, we can probably affirm that all events are inserted into the text to make them contribute to leading the heroine to become a spiritual convert. This authorial meaning corresponds to the underlying message in the parable of the Prodigal Son and the creed of the Plan of Salvation—penitent sinners will be saved by God.

An emphasis is placed on goodness of Theresa's spirit through her lifelong attachment for Duke which is depicted in her varied responses to his actions dispersed across the tale. For instance, (a) she expresses her resentment against his procrastination in coming to Paris because her father and she expected his joining them should stop "the various proposals . . . for Theresa's hand from needy French noblemen" (P&C 4: 347). (b) She shows her "pretty proud reserve" to Duke at his visit to her Paris home when both know the actual situation of her married life—"the lovely English heiress" was "entrapped into a marriage with one of the most disreputable of" the French nobility, "a gambler and a reprobate"—, as she does not want her former fiancé to think she is unhappy although she has sensed that he knows she is (P&C 4: 348). For her, his visit is an "honour" (P&C 4: 348), and his presence "a comfort and a pleasure" (P&C 4: 348-49). (c) Theresa utters the words of regret at the news of "the approaching marriage between Duke and Bessy": "I never expected it—I never thought of it—but, perhaps, it was but natural" (P&C 4: 351). Her concealed attachment to Duke is confirmed by her old French nurse Victorine when she replies, "It was not natural; it was infamous! To have loved you once, and not to wait for chances, but to take up with that mean poor

girl at the Parsonage" (P&C 4: 351). (d) After her return to Crowley Castle as a widow and her father's death as the result of "a gradual decline of strength" (P&C 4: 355), Theresa helps Duke to be elected as a member of parliament for Sussex. There may be a tinge of selfishness in her scheme to make him "shine and rise in his new sphere" (P&C 4: 356) because it is carried out in disregard of his passive and homely wife's opposition. According to Theresa, however, it is Bessy who is selfish because she is hampering Duke by failing to "take an interest in all he cares for" (P&C 4: 356) and by "her narrow mind" (P&C 4: 357). It is worth remembering that, even in this crash of opinion between them, "the two ladies" exhibit goodness of their spirits. Bessy displays her humble reconsideration of her outlook for her husband's future in her recognition of stupidity: "I was never clever in anything but housewifery"; Theresa discloses her inward tenderness in her modesty of being "touched . . . by this humility" (P&C 4: 356). Besides, however difficult it may be, they "wish to be, and . . . strive to appear" friendly (P&C 4: 356). Theresa's hope for his success expressed in her utterance—his "powers are unknown even to himself, or he would put her feeble nature on one side, and seek his higher atmosphere. How he would shine! How he does shine!"—seems to come from her genuine thoughtfulness for Duke (P&C 4: 357). When he returns home "for a parliamentary recess"—the narrator's stress on Theresa's attachment to Duke continues—she "calculated the hours of each part of the complicated journey, and could have told to five minutes when he might be expected" (P&C 4: 357), and gives the successful politician her proud welcome with "her eyes shining out love and pride" (P&C 4: 357-58). On the night of his return, she gives "way to another burst of disparaging remarks on poor motherly homely Bessy," and that night Victorine thinks "she read a deeper secret in Theresa's heart" (P&C 4: 358), that is, Theresa's

hidden love for Duke. Reddy also reads the phrase “a deeper secret in Theresa’s heart” as meaning “Theresa is in love with Duke Brownlow” (65). (e) More than one year after Bessy’s death (P&C 4: 359), Theresa is rewarded for her continuous concern for her childhood fiancé. Her confession to Victorine made after her marriage unveils her constancy in love for Duke: “now I am so happy, so inexpressibly happy” (P&C 4: 361). Last but not least, (f) her constant affection for Duke is suggested in her desperate pursuit of him at the closing paragraphs of this tale (P&C 4: 365). Having believed the dying Victorine’s confession that she was tempted by Theresa to kill Bessy and did it for her lady’s service (P&C 4: 363), Duke feels “he would fain not have faced the woman, but would rather have remained in doubt to his dying day” (P&C 4: 364). Theresa hardly reads Duke’s letter telling his determination to separate himself from her when she gallops all through the night to Dover with her horse keeper to clear his misunderstanding. She cannot forbear to lose her husband’s love under the situation of being misunderstood, but she is too late. These instances of her constancy in love for Duke in her life’s trials and tribulations provide sure indications of fundamental goodness of her spirit.

A question here arises. Why is there no distinct reference to her salvation in the text? Does Theresa die, only “paying for childish spitefulness” (Easson, *EG* 220)? Without hearing any explanation from Theresa about the validity of Victorine’s testimony to her lady’s commitment to her crime—“I leave you to your conscience, for you have slept in my bosom. Henceforward I am a stranger to you” (P&C 4: 365) is Duke’s farewell note to Theresa—, her second husband takes his daughter Mary and his mother-in-law Madam Hawtrey with him to leave her alone in England (P&C 4: 365). Theresa is buried in a churchyard at Dover, where she saw her husband’s ship sailing for the Continent (P&C 4: 365). Her burial at Dover

betokens her longing for her husband, her faithfulness towards him, and her remorse for what happened in her life.

Quoting Charles Dickens's remark on the tale that "Mrs. Gaskell (the authoress of that story) has a way of rather abusing her strength, by making her victims unjustly unhappy sometimes" ("To the Countess Cowley 13 December 1863." Pilgrim 10: 326; emphasis added), Easson articulates his sympathy towards the protagonist: "certainly Theresa is unhappy in both her marriages" (*EG* 220). In concert with Easson, Bacigalupo is sympathetic towards Theresa, whom she regards as "a victim of circumstance" (186). Our biblical interpretation of the text confirms that this evocation of compassion in the heart of the reader is exactly what Gaskell meant. This ending evokes uncertainty, dissatisfaction, and injustice in the reader, who cannot help wondering why Theresa has to meet this sad death and why Duke leaves her without hearing her excuse directly from herself concerning the validity of Victorine's confession. This is an advanced technique of fiction writers to raise the reader's sympathy toward their protagonist. Gaskell thus creates a circumstance where her readers cannot help imagining in their mind that Theresa's salvation should be a logical conclusion especially when they remember the repentant prodigal's humble endeavours to endure her life's trials and tribulations as well as one of the key creeds of Unitarianism—tolerance and forgiveness towards penitents. Nectoux observes,

The Unitarians . . . adopted a Universalist approach to Hell and God's infinite ability to forgive sinners and non-believers. All would eventually be forgiven their sins and admitted to the Kingdom of Heaven. (*Selected* 13; Saracino "Interpreting" 112).

The two highest standards of moral living that Gaskell gleaned from her Unitarian background were the ideals of tolerance and forgiveness. To her, the two always went hand in hand. (*Selected* 16; Saracino, "Interpreting" 113).

Her view is shared by Enid L. Duthie, who remarks that Gaskell's "religious faith . . . determined her interpretation of those areas of life with which she dealt. . . . Gaskell's work . . . is impregnated with the spirit of New Testament Christianity. . . . what matters is the moral and spiritual atmosphere . . . of religious tolerance" (*Themes* 150), by John Chapple when he insists that, in Gaskell's fiction, Unitarianism's "humane perspectives are omnipresent. Criticism of social evils, compassion for suffering humanity, and hard-won trust in divine providence pervade the stories" ("Unitarian Dissent" 165), and by Styler, who observes that "Unitarianism was often expressed as an optimistic moral philosophy" ("Problem" 34).

4.2.2. Victorine

Following the female prodigal Theresa, her French *bonne* Victorine shows the second highest activity rate among the main characters, and makes the third highest appearance according to the Comprehensive Chronology. The interaction between French servant's influence on the pathetic heroine has been delineated from the start of the tale: Victorine "had been in attendance on the young Theresa from her earliest infancy, and almost took the place of a parent in power and affection" (P&C 4: 340), is "the faithful friend whom Theresa looked upon as a mother" (P&C 4: 347), and is "so faithful a follower" (P&C 4: 360). Victorine may be considered as a villainous criminal, since she "in fact, is very nearly a double murderer" (Hughes, "Worker" 30): she prepares "the quieting draught" (P&C 4: 360) with the intention of killing profligate and "scurrilous French count"

(Hughes, "Worker" 39) Adolphe, Theresa's first husband, in vain (P&C 4: 353; 360) and purposefully gives Bessy, the wife of Theresa's old fiancé Duke, her doctor's drug much more than its proper dose only to instigate her death (P&C 4: 363). But the situation is not so simple, since, according to her own insistence, she takes these abominable actions only to remove pain from her young mistress Theresa: "It was not for myself I would have done it, but because you suffered so" (P&C 4: 361). Victorine is depicted as a lady's maid whose self-sacrificing loyalty to her mistress Theresa prompts her to plot termination of the lives of her mistress's enemies without consulting Theresa herself. The "devoted but designing French lady's-maid" (Ward 7: xlii) loves her lady so blindly as to become self-centred, and thus loses herself. This is one of the most fatal errors in the egoistic decision of the selfless Frenchwoman. To investigate Gaskell's view of the possibility of salvation of such a character as Victorine is the main purpose of this section.

The evilness of her spirit has been pointed out by critics: for instance, "Victorine sets out to be a witch, dabbling with poisonous mixtures and plotting the deaths of all who cross her or Theresa" (Reddy 143); she is called the "devilish" Frenchwoman (Foster, "Violence" 19). Victorine's attachment to "her darling" (P&C 4: 353) in her touching "the soft bruised flesh with her lips, much as though Theresa were the child she had been twenty years ago" (P&C 4: 353) is an example of the narratorial emphasis on her eccentricity in her blind love for her young mistress. When the "fanatically devoted French maid" (Hughes, "Worker" 30) comes back with her widowed countess from Paris to Crowley Castle, her temper is "not improved by her four years abroad" (P&C 4: 355); she not only treasures "up her vengeance" (P&C 4: 355) for Bessy's disobedient servants, but also shows "no diminution of her influence over her mistress" (P&C 4: 355). Indeed, Victorine's

influence over her young countess is so strong that “Theresa was in reality a servant” to her servant (P&C 4: 363).

One of the most striking instances of her selfless devotion to Theresa is her self-sacrificing nursing of her young mistress who was taken ill with small-pox. The narrator draws the reader’s attention to Victorine’s virtue in succumbing to the dreadful illness when all danger to the child is over: “Theresa came out of it with unblemished beauty; Victorine barely escaped with life, and was disfigured for life” (P&C 4: 340). Her altruism in helping her “angel . . . cherished” (P&C 4: 342) is almost equal to Ruth Hilton’s in her fatal nursing of her former lover Bellingham (*RU* 441-49). Considering the salvation of Ruth, a repentant sinner, is hinted at in her death-bed vision “I see the Light coming” (*RU* 448), as the Light signifies Jesus Christ,³³ Victorine’s altruist action could be construed as incorporated into the text to suggest the authorial implication of her salvation. Victorine’s unselfish fidelity to her young lady, which may gradually come to show possessiveness, is depicted in other scenes too. For instance, (a) it is simply “for the purpose of upholding the lying fiction of Theresa’s having been a happy prosperous marriage” after her return home as a widow that Victorine is dressed in the mourning (P&C 4: 354). (b) She becomes “always indignant if any of the old servants” falls “back into the once familiar appellation of Miss Theresa. ‘The countess,’ she would say, in lofty rebuke” (P&C 4: 354)—this rebuke is a sign of Victorine’s loyalty for Theresa.

Victorine is a Bible reader as is betokened in some of her references to scriptural verses. (a) Blaming her lady’s old fiancé for marrying Bessy, she says, “Mr Duke Brownlow ought to have waited, waited, waited. Some one waited fourteen

³³ “The Lord is my light and my salvation” (Ps. 27.1; See Isa. 60.19, John 8.12, and John 9.5 also).

years, did he not?” (P&C 4: 351; emphasis added), which is an allusion to the Old Testament episode of Jacob’s 14-year labour for gaining his love Rachel (Gen. 29.15-30). (b) When the corpse of Adolphe’s is brought in, Victorine, before giving him a light stroke on his shoulder in revenge for his stroke on Theresa—“his heavy closed hand fell on her white shoulder with a terrible blow!” (P&C 4: 352)—, mutters “you shall take this with you, whithersoever your wicked soul is fleeing” (P&C 4: 353; emphasis added). This allusion to the spirit’s going to heaven or hell is a reflection of the Christian concept that physical death means the separation of the spirit from the mortal body (Eccles. 12.7; Jas. 2.26). (c) More than one year after Bessy’s death, when Victorine confesses to Theresa her crime of murdering Bessy, the French *bonne* alludes to Bessy’s current situation in paradise: “She sleeps now, and she has met her baby before this, if priests’ tales are true” (P&C 4: 361). Her allusion corresponds to the Plan of Salvation which endorses the existence of the next world where spirits go after separating themselves from bodies—“the body without the spirit is dead” (Jas. 2.26). The quotation below taken from the Unitarian priest Revd Giles’s lecture contains the Unitarian belief in the existence of the afterlife in the postmortal world, although his purport is to insist that our spirits should be active even in heaven rather than asleep: “To millions, heaven seems to be for the soul what the grave is for the body—a place of mere repose,” but “such a view of heaven . . . must not exhaust our thoughts of future bliss. Our highest happiness, even in heaven, must consist in highest action: no other happiness can exist for a moral and intellectual being than that which calls his faculties into energy, and supplies both with materials and objects on which to engage them” (“Lecture XII,” *UD* 23-24). A mother’s meeting with her child in the postmortal world is expressed in the scene of “Lizzie Leigh” too where Anne Leigh encourages

Lizzie to have a hope for reuniting her dead daughter in the other world: “if it’s gone to be an angel, it will speak to God for thee. . . . thou shalt have it again in Heaven” (“LL” 30).

According to Victorine, both her attempted murder of Adolphe the Count de Grange and her execution of Bessy’s poisoning are the actions taken by selfless motives. The “quieting draught” (P&C 4: 360) for Theresa’s first husband is prepared not merely as the “wish for his death does lie at” her door, but also as he stroke Theresa, whom Victorine “nursed on” her “breast” (P&C 4: 361). Thanks to her helping the doctor sleep Bessy, the French nurse’s “beauty . . . queen” (P&C 4: 361) is now the mistress of Crowley Castle, her old fiancé Duke’s wife (P&C 4: 361). She overdosed Bessy simply for Theresa’s sake. In terms of Christian ethics, however, if there is one example of Victorine’s sinful conducts, it should be her self-absorbed judgment of others. Although she insists that the motives of her attempted murder of Adolphe and her overdosing Bessy are simply for the sake of her mistress (P&C 4: 361), “Judge not, that ye not be judged” (Matt. 7.1-2; Luke 6.37) is Christ’s teaching; “avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Rom. 12.19) is the Apostle Paul’s instruction. Victorine violets them.

The suggestion of even the jealous Victorine being a spirit child, or of the possibility of her salvation, is hinted at in three ways in the depiction of the old French nurse in declining health. (a) First, when left alone at Crowley Castle by Duke, who takes his wife from her to Brighton, Victorine utters as many as four times “as if she were in an ague-fit” in her delirious confession of poisoning Bessy to her mother Madam Hawtrey that she sees her daughter’s ghost: “Let *her* [Theresa] face the dead woman standing there. . . . you have gone away, and left me

alone with the dead woman! she . . . has left me here alone with the dead woman. Theresa, Theresa, come back and save me from the dead woman!" (P&C 4: 363; emphasis added). This is a sign of the revelation of her guilty conscience, as in the case of conscience-stricken Macbeth, who sees the ghost of Banquo, the fellow general of the king's army whom he murdered, in his banquet (*Mac.*, 3.4.73, 93-95). (b) The second hint for goodness of her spirit is incorporated in her death-bed confession to the same effect to Revd Roberts the vicar, who later informs his old pupil Duke of dying Victorine's request to him, "she will not die until she has seen you, and got you to forgive her, if Madam Hawtrey will not" (P&C 4: 364). (c) The third hint for her spirit's goodness is furnished in her silent acknowledgement to Duke that Theresa knows her poisoning of his first wife (P&C 4: 364-65). Victorine's confession of her crime as many as three times, made because she cannot "carry her awful secret into the next world" (P&C 4: 365), is the firm evidence of her contrite heart. In passing, Victorine's love for Mary the daughter of Duke and Bessy is another piece of evidence that even she is also a spirit child: "Almost the only creature Victorine cared for, besides Theresa, was the little Mary Brownlow. What there was of softness in her woman's nature, seemed to come out towards children" (P&C 4: 355).

Foster articulates Gaskell's continuous concern in the difficult phases of our life: "her stories continually take us to the roots of social and psychological disorder and suffering, of which there may be no simple resolution" ("Violence" 15). Saracino spotlights Gaskell's interest in depicting the evilness of a good person: "she depicted a benevolent character committing an uncharacteristically 'villainous' act in order to underline the darker side of human nature" ("Interpreting" 108). Whether even such a sinner as Victorine will be saved or not is scarcely

stated in the text except for a few implications of her spirit's goodness, or again its judgement is committed to the reader's discretion. The narrator simply scatters the depictions of Victorine's goodness over the storyline as if reminding the reader of her being God's child.

4.2.3. Duke

Duke Brownlow's change in character from "empathic, intellectually curious, talented, and ethically responsible" (L. K. Hughes, "Worker" 39) to imprudent and injudicious is another noteworthy point of this short story. This section investigates the reason for this authorial design.

At first, Duke, "seven or eight years older than his cousin" Theresa (P&C 4: 340), is introduced as a moral guide for her and Bessy, who are "little more than children" (P&C 4: 341) for him. He "was establishing his first principles of morality for himself, and her conduct towards Bessy sometimes jarred against his ideas of right" (P&C 4: 341). Therefore, he remonstrates with the former, "You had no right to blame Bessy as you did. It was as much your fault as hers" (P&C 4: 341), and talks to her about "moralities against duelling" (P&C 4: 343). Since he has "been so uniformly gentle and thoughtful in his behaviour to her," Bessy feels "him to be her pattern of noble chivalrous manhood," and esteems "his principles" (P&C 4: 344). His discretion, or modesty, is also emphasized: although being "distinguished himself" at Oxford, he is "unspoiled by the fame and reputation he had gained at Christ Church," and "spoken well of" by everyone (P&C 4: 343). His intellectual excellence and brilliant talents are expressed in the narratorial remark about his preparation for the grand tour. He is "quite wise enough, and steady enough," and "probably knew a good deal more about what was best to be observed in the countries"; he is "to come back full of historical and political knowledge,

speaking French and Italian like a native, and having a smattering of barbarous German . . . to enter the House as a county member, if possible—as a borough member at the worst; and . . . to make a great success” (P&C 4: 344). His consideration for his family is stressed also in the text. He is kind enough to weigh in his mind “what he could do or say to soften the obdurate heart of his cousin” soon after his remonstrance with her for her arrogance (P&C 4: 343). He is “so uniformly gentle and thoughtful in his behaviour to Bessy” (P&C 4: 344). He refrains from telling Sir Mark of the woeful “ill-report of the count in Paris” in consideration of his uncle’s feelings for his daughter (P&C 4: 348). Duke pays a visit to the married Theresa at her Paris home, hoping his presence being “a comfort and a pleasure to her” (P&C 4: 349). After his return from the grand tour, he devotes himself to the comfort of his uncle (P&C 4: 349).

This narratorial stress on Duke’s goodness starts to weaken after his marriage to Bessy. His decline of his moral integrity is hinted at in the narrator’s brief comment on his jealousy for Bessy as the “lady of the castle”—“Duke was always more jealous for his wife’s position than she herself was” (P&C 4: 354)—, and also on his diminishing sense of filial duty—he comes to have “a repugnance to his mother-in-law’s constant company” (P&C 4: 357). “About a year after Sir Mark’s death” (P&C 4: 356), i.e. 1773, when Duke is about 28 or 29, he comes to concentrate on achieving his political ambition, and, because of his success and prosperity in London, gradually comes to hold unconscious arrogance and vanity. The death of his heir child, however, reminds him that the pursuit of worldly reputation is against the Apostle Paul’s teaching of doing the will of God rather than loving the world (1 John 2.15-17), for he feels “the vanity of fame, as compared to a baby’s life” (P&C 4: 358).

The shift of Duke's target of love arouses some doubts about his moral integrity. First, he is aware of the unspoken understanding between Theresa and himself that they will get married; second, about a year or so after her marriage to a French nobleman, he marries Bessy (See Table 4); third, about a year or so after her death, he takes his childhood fiancée Theresa for his wife (See Table 4); and fourth, immediately after believing "Theresa is guilty of ordering" Bessy's murder (Reddy 65), he forgets "almost everything but Bessy, his first wife, his innocent girlish bride" (P&C 4: 365). To change the object of love within so short a period as a couple of years appears to be a sign of fickle-heartedness. Alternatively, Duke's inconsistency in love could be interpreted as a sign of his resilience. Whichever sign it may be, his change should be an authorial device for stressing the intensity of unreasonableness of the penitent sinner Theresa's agony and hence for attracting the reader's sympathy towards her.³⁴

At first, there seems a mutual understanding between Duke and Theresa that they "might make a match" (P&C 4: 340). For him, Theresa is the best girl:

³⁴ For example, Charley Kinraid the navy lieutenant, who marries a middle-class lady within about one year—"not so many weeks" (*SL* 496), according to Sylvia's calculation—after his heart-rendering discovery of his fiancée Sylvia Robson's marriage to her cousin Phillip Hepburn during his three-year absence (Ohno, "Revised Chronology" 136-38), is judged as "faithless and fickle" by the heroine herself (*SL* 496). Edward Holdsworth, the railway engineer who once confessed his love for the eponymous heroine Phillis Holman to his assistant Paul Manning (*CP* 208), marries a girl in Canada also within a year—actually "ten months" (*CP* 230)—after the confession. All three stories depicting a man's inconsistency were published in 1863—*Sylvia's Lovers* by Smith, Elder, on 20 February (Uglow, *EG* 529; J. G. Sharps, *O&I* 373), *Cousin Phillis* from "November 1863 to February 1864, in *The Cornhill Magazine*" (J. G. Sharps, *O&I* 427), and "Crowley Castle" in "the 1863 Extra Christmas Number of *All the Year Round*" (J. G. Sharps, *O&I* 449). This coincidence might not presumably be irrelevant to the breaking-off of Gaskell's second daughter Meta's engagement to Captain Charles Hill in August 1858 (*Further Letters* 190, *Letters* 639). Captain Hill, who engaged himself to Meta before early August 1857 (*Letters* 463, 465), changed his mind in about "a year" as Duke, Kinraid, and Holdsworth do. In her letter dated 10 December 1860, Gaskell writes "Meta's great desire is to avoid any *chance* of falling in with him" (*Letters* 639). She started the project of *Sylvia's Lovers* in June 1859 (*Letters* 560; Uglow, *EG* 504). A detailed biographical background is explained by J. G. Sharps (*O&I* 348-49). A detailed biographical background concerning the broken engagement is explained by J. G. Sharps (*O&I* 348-49), who proposes a similar guess about the correlation between the fact and Gaskell's repeated description of a man's change of mind (*O&I* 395-98).

“Of course he admired his cousin Theresa the most” since her childhood (P&C 4: 341). For the fifteen-year old maiden, Duke could be an ideal husband: “she would marry him, and no one else” (P&C 4: 343). However, she makes a “stolen marriage” with Adolphe at the age of 18. One year or so after, Duke makes a proposal to Bessy, who has “been secretly in love with” him “with all her heart for nearly a year, almost worshipping him” (P&C 4: 350). Concerning his decision to accept her as his wife, the narrator explains, “of all the women he had ever known—except perhaps the lost Theresa—Bessy Hawtrey had it in her power to make him the happiest of men” (P&C 4: 350). This remark elucidates that his decision is apt, and at the same time that Bessy is his second best. Theresa’s dismay at knowing Duke’s marriage to her childhood companion—“I never expected it—I never thought of it—but, perhaps, it was but natural” (P&C 4: 351)—could be a manifestation of her long-cherished affection for him. The appropriateness of this assumption might be verified by the ensuing condemnation of Duke’s fickleness by Victorine, her “faithful friend” (P&C 4: 347), however self-righteous her quotation from the Old Testament to support their view of the situation may look like: “Mr Duke Brownlow ought to have waited, waited, waited. Some one waited fourteen years, did he not?” (P&C 4: 351; Gen. 29.15-30).

Hughes observes Duke is “thrice wounded in love—by Theresa when she spurns him for the scurrilous French count, by the death of his first wife Bessy, and by learning that Theresa knew of Bessy’s poisoning by Victorine—all the more poignant” (Hughes, “Worker” 39). The narratorial depiction of his first and second wound, however, is scarcely graphic. (a) After the completion of his grand tour, during which his fiancée marries the French count Adolphe, he comes home “depressed in spirits” (P&C 4: 348). But whether the reason of his depression is his

lost love or not is unclearly stated, or it may rather be Sir Mark's "unjust blame" for his delay in joining him and his daughter in Paris which, his uncle fancies, brought about Theresa's "stolen marriage" (P&C 4: 348). His evening visit to Theresa at her Paris home is paid rather out of goodwill than out of lingering love because he knows "the wo[e]ful ill-report" of her husband, feels sympathy for her unhappy marriage, and considers his presence as "a comfort and a pleasure to her" (P&C 4: 349). (b) His response to Bessy's death is depicted only briefly: "Duke felt his wife's death deeply, but reasonably, as became his character" (P&C 4: 359). Is it because she was not what his wife was expected to be, as was predicted by her father Revd Hawtrey as to her unsuitability as his wife: "Bessy . . . has not been brought up as your wife should have been: at least as folks will say your wife should have been" (P&C 4: 350)? The affirmative answer to this question is offered by Hughes: "Bessy is unable to function as the supportive wife of a talented man with a brilliant career ahead of him" ("Worker" 31). Or is it because he is too busy to soak himself into deep sorrow? His political success at this time is articulated by the narrator as this: "Duke was but mortal [admitting no reconciliation, very great]. All London chanted his rising fame" (P&C 4: 358). Whichever the reason may be, the brevity of the narratorial description of his response to Bessy's death seems to imply unsentimentality and resilience of his nature.

(c) The narratorial depiction of Duke's third wound is most graphic and glamorous. After his marrying Theresa, she becomes his "darling wife and true companion" (P&C 4: 361), the ideal wife because, through her, Duke first fully enters "into the comprehension of all that a wife might be" (P&C 4: 361), and "the loveliest woman" (P&C 4: 361) in the London society. Regarding his marriage to Theresa after Bessy's death, Rebenius observes that Duke experiences for the first

time “what a perfect marriage is” (85). After knowing his second wife’s involvement into Victorine’s poisoning his first wife through the old French servant’s confession, he decides to leave the former, who has been so faithful and good to him, without examining the validity of her old nurse’s explanation which does not necessarily reflect the true situation of Bessy’s death. When told by Victorine that, in Paris, she learned “the art of poisoning” for her countess’s service, Theresa blanches “to a deadly white” (P&C 4: 360). When intimated by Victorine that the success of poisoning Bessy made Theresa Duke’s wife, her countess replies, “I do not know what you mean!” (P&C 4: 361). Reddy observes, “Gaskell implies that Theresa is as guilty of murdering her rival as if she had actually ordered Victorine to commit the crime” (65). These responses of Theresa, however, seems to provide clear indications that she has had no knowledge of Victorine’s plot. In addition, it is Duke himself in a sense that induces the terrible confession of Victorine, who mistakenly believes herself being tricked by her beloved mistress and utters “the awe-stricken words” in unrequited passion after Duke sends his wife to Brighton without consulting them for her change of air. Theresa’s exclamation “O! What will Victorine say?” is a sure sign of her ignorance of her husband’s secret plan (P&C 363). In his desperate mood, nevertheless, he seems to “forget almost everything but Bessy, his first wife, his innocent girlish bride” (P&C 4: 365). To note, it is only a couple of weeks (P&C 4:363) before he makes decision to leave Theresa that he feels painful affection for his drooping wife: “With all this renewed sense of his darling’s virtues and charms, the idea of losing her was too terrible to bear” (P&C 4: 362). The question arises, here, why he determines to discard her without confirming the validity of Victorine’s confession and also without listening to Theresa’s own excuses. If this question could be evoked in the reader’s mind, then,

Gaskell's purpose for creating this uncertainty should be fulfilled. For, it is to spotlight Duke's inconsideration, indiscretion, and injustice, and hence to draw the reader's sympathy towards remorseful Theresa that she designs Duke's change from morally righteous to injudicious. If he is as virtuous as ever, his indiscretion in leaving Theresa becomes unnatural.

4.2.4. Bessy

The differences of the spiritual and physical features between Bessy and Theresa are stressed throughout the story. While Theresa, born into a rich baronet's family (P&C 4: 339), is "wilful . . . wayward" (P&C 4: 340) as well as "supercilious and unfeeling" (P&C 4: 341) and "obdurate" (P&C 4: 343), Bessy, a parson's daughter, is "gentle quiet . . . sensible sweet-tempered . . . self-contained and patient" (P&C 4: 341). The former has "grey" (P&C 4: 340, 341) eyes, "a round slender throat" (P&C 4: 340), and a "slight lithe graceful form" (P&C 4: 341), the latter has "brown" (P&C 4: 341, 342) eyes with a "round" face and "a stiff tough well-made figure" (P&C 4: 341).

Theresa's "tyranny" over "the self-contained and patient Bessy" in a mathematical lesson is contrasted with the latter's willing and tacit acceptance of the former's shy apology (P&C 4: 341); Theresa's "momentary fit of passion" (P&C 4: 345) is in contrast to Bessy's selfless suppression of her sorrow "in sympathy with her friend's gladness" about her winter stay in Paris (P&C 4: 345). The difference between Theresa's "wilful" manner and Bessy's "gentle peaceful" one shown on the day of Duke's departure for the grand tour is another instance of the stark contrast in the two girls' characters (P&C 4: 344).

She admired his sentiments, she esteemed his principles, she considered his long evolvment of his ideas as the truest eloquence. He had

lent her books, he had directed her studies; all the advice and information which Theresa had rejected had fallen to Bessy's lot, and she had received it thankfully. (P&C 4: 344)

In contrast to Theresa's moral incompleteness, Bessy's Christian integrity is consistent. Before departing for Paris, Theresa makes some "grand promises of Paris fashion, and presents of dress," but Bessy does not "care much for them" (P&C 4: 345). She is "pure good to the heart's core and most hidden thought; sensible in all her accustomed daily ways, yet not so much without imagination as not to desire something beyond the narrow range of knowledge and experience in which her days had hitherto been passed" (P&C 4: 349). While "beautiful" (P&C 4: 346) Theresa—with "rare beauty and . . . courtly grace" (P&C 4: 356)—displays "the inbred coquetry of her nature" (P&C 4: 346) to charm various French gentlemen only in three months, Bessy, equally beautiful as her friend—"a daisy of an English maiden . . . her pretty figure . . . the belle of a country town" (P&C 4: 349-50)—has "been secretly in love with" only Duke "with all her heart for nearly a year" (P&C 4: 350) since he comes back from the continent to Crowley Castle. Bessy's Christian discretion and generosity are explicit. She willingly accepts Theresa when she returns to Crowley Castle after experiencing the bitter wedded life in Paris. In answer to Sir Mark's wish for her replacement in position as the mistress of the castle with Theresa his natural daughter, the narrator voices that "Bessy would have given up her" onerous "dignities without a word" (P&C 4: 354). Actually, "Bessy . . . in everything tried to remember what Theresa liked, and how affairs were ordered in the old Theresa days. She wished the servants to feel that 'the countess' had equal rights with herself in the management of the house" (P&C 4: 355). She entreats her old friend "in the pure innocence of her heart" to continue

to stay in the Castle, for her husband should be pleased to have “a companion so much to his mind” (P&C 4: 356).

The clash of opinion between Bessy and Theresa concerning Duke’s political potential provides a typical representation of their difference in character—the “passive . . . quiet. . . . housewifery” (P&C 4: 356) country-bred girl and the “intellectual ambitious” (P&C 4: 357) aristocrat lady with her “Parisian experience” (P&C 4: 357). Bessy confesses her anxiety to Theresa: “You speak as if his presence here were nothing, and his fame in London everything. I cannot help fearing that he will leave off caring for all the quiet ways in which we have been so happy ever since we were married” (P&C 4: 356); on the other hand, Theresa is critical of her humble friend: “Duke is hampered with this woman: he whose powers are unknown even to himself, or he would put her feeble nature on one side, and seek his higher atmosphere. How he would shine! How he does shine!” (P&C 4: 357). Aina Rubenius presumes that “Crowley Castle” illustrates the shift of Gaskell’s concept of an ideal wife from the “Angel in the House” type Bessy to a new self-asserting type Theresa. The feminist critic argues that the author’s descriptions of the two girls is a reflection of the change of “her conception of the perfect wife” (89): “At the time when she wrote *Crowley Castle* she had nothing but pity, condescension, contempt almost, for the ‘innocent virtues’ of Bessy, whereas the sparkling, intelligent passionate Theresa had all her sympathy” (86). Rubenius explains the main reasons for this change lie in Gaskell’s “intellectual and artistic” (89) growth gained from her journey to Rome in early 1857 (86), her repeated journeys to Paris since 1854 (88), and her observations of the marriage failures of her two acquaintances—Charles Dickens and John Ruskin (90-91). In Gaskell’s contrastive drawing of the two girls, Reddy views her suggestion “that the ideal

wife would be a blend of the positive characteristics of both Bessy and Theresa” (52). Taking into account the contrast between Duke’s subsequent success as “a rising statesman” (P&C 4: 359) in London as in “All London chanted his rising fame” (P&C 4: 358), and his reflection upon the vanity of political fame (P&C 4: 358), our Christian reading of the text may endorse Bessy’s righteousness in morality.

The purport of this dispute scene, however, seems to lie not on the moral judgement of the two women’s contrastive views, but on the fermentation of Victorine’s secret project of killing Bessy, since it ends with the French nurse’s “furtive” watching (P&C 4: 357) of indignant Theresa, who is disappointed with Bessy’s “weak selfish arguments” (P&C 4: 357). This reading is verified by Theresa’s “another burst of disparaging remarks on poor motherly homely Bessy” on the night of Duke’s temporary return to Crowley Castle for “parliamentary recess” (P&C 4: 357) which Victorine misinterprets as a manifestation of “a deeper secret” in her mistress’s heart (P&C 4: 358), i.e. her love for Duke behind her wish for Bessy’s death—on this Victorine’s misunderstanding of Theresa’s disparaging remark on Bessy, Reddy offers a similar interpretation: “when she thinks Theresa is in love with Duke Brownlow, Victorine poisons his wife so that he will be free to marry Theresa” (65). It is disclosed later in her interview with Theresa that Victorine’s interpretation of her mistress’s heart at this point is made in accordance with her self-righteous judgement as in the case of her failed attempt at murdering Adolphe, who stroke her beloved countess: “The wish for his death does lie at your door; and the intent to rid you of him does lie at my door. . . .can’t you see how the incomplete action once stopped by Fate, was tried again, and with success” (P&C 4: 361). Victorine’s carelessness and arbitrariness in judgement are confirmed by

Theresa reply: "Those days are past. Do not let us recal (sic) them. I was so wicked because I was so miserable" (P&C 4: 361).

The contrast between Theresa and Bessy is highlighted as one of the strong points of Gaskell's descriptive power. Ward affirms that it is "one of those conflicts of personality which no hand was better able to delineate with fidelity to nature than her own" (7: xlii); Ellis H. Chadwick writes "Very cleverly does the novelist bring out the contrast between Bessy and Theresa" (295). As Bacigalupo articulates, while Theresa has "the moral imperfection" (182) as well as "a flawed character and youthful indiscretions" (186), Bessy "is modeled after the passive paragons of the moralizing tradition" (182). While Theresa's salvation is entrusted to the reader's discretion, Bessy's is intimated in Victorine's confession of her overdosing Bessy to death: "She sleeps now, and she has met her baby before this, if priests' tales are true" (P&C 4: 361). "Priests' tales" here denote those about the Christian doctrine of eternal life, or God's Plan of Salvation.

4.2.5. Sir Mark

In comparison with Anne Leigh, the mother of the prodigal in "Lizzie Leigh," and Nathan and Hester Huntroyd, the parents of the profligate in "The Crooked Branch," whose genuine compassion and enduring affection for their prodigal children together with their moral integrity and absolute faith in God are especially highlighted in each story, Sir Mark, the father of the prodigal in "Crowley Castle," is created as an ordinary man who has human strength as well as weakness and shows little Christian faith, although all the parents are common in their complete forgiveness for their prodigal children's transgressions. Needless to say, both Anne Leigh and Nathan Huntroyd have their own weak points—the former rebels "against her husband as against a tyrant, with a hidden, sullen rebellion,

which tore up the old land-marks of wifely duty and affection, and poisoned the fountains whence gentlest love and reverence had once been for ever springing” (“LL” 3); the latter, when his letter to Benjamin is returned undelivered, immediately jumps “to the conclusion that his child” was “starved to death, without money, in a wild, wide, strange place,” without confirming the true situation (“CB” 249). Notwithstanding, their weakness is less conspicuous than their strength including Christian integrity, enduring love for their prodigal children, and fervent trust in God. In the case of Sir Mark, however, he is described as “an easy and indolent man” (P&C 4: 340) whose “indulgence” makes his daughter “more wayward” (P&C 4: 340), and who, faithful to “his dead wife’s wish that the management of” Theresa “should be confided to” Victorine, gives up the paterfamilias’s authority of controlling the French *bonne* as indicated in the narratorial remark: “Only once had there been a struggle for power between Sir Mark and the *bonne*, and then she had won the victory” (P&C 4: 340). In addition, there appears no scene in the tale where he reads Scriptures, or prays to God for his daughter’s happiness.

One of his prominent strong points is his selfless affection for his cherished daughter. Therefore, Theresa’s “stolen marriage” is so appalling as to make him speechless and unhealthy, and he sinks “into an old querulous grey-haired man” (P&C 4: 348). He decides that her “husband should never enter the gates of” Crowley Castle in Sir Mark’s lifetime, but that if she likes to visit her Castle, “she should be as welcome as a daughter of the house ought to be, and ever should be” (P&C 4: 348). He reads his treasure’s letters from Paris, which are “like arrows of pain” to him, only to groan and sigh over “the utter wretchedness of the writer” (P&C 4: 350). While Theresa lives in Paris bitterly regretting over “her ill-starred marriage”

(P&C 4: 352), Sir Mark “almost hated the tender attentions which were rendered to him by those who were not his Theresa, his only child, for whose presence he yearned and longed in silent misery” (P&C 4: 352). When she returned home from Paris as a widow, he was “anxious to show her that all was forgiven, and would fain have displaced Bessy from her place as lady of the castle, and made Theresa take the leadership of the house, and sit at table where the mistress ought to be” (P&C 4: 354; emphasis added). Sir Mark’s full forgiveness of his prodigal daughter and their mutual affection, an obvious mirror of the father’s full forgiveness of his prodigal son in the biblical parable, are elucidated in the narratorial remark on their companionship at the time of her recuperation: “They sat sometimes for hours hand in hand; or they sauntered out on the terraces, hardly speaking, but happy; because they were once more together, and once more on loving terms” (P&C 4: 355).

Sir Mark’s generous love for Theresa sometimes leads him to utter arrogant and self-centred remarks towards those who are insensible to his inner conflict. For instance, when Revd Hawtrey, Bessy’s father, pays occasional visits to “his parishioner in his trouble” over Theresa’s stolen marriage, and feels compassion “with him in his sorrow,” Sir Mark is “too proud to bear it,” and “sometimes . . . so rude to his old neighbour” (P&C 4: 349). Another example of his self-centredness is found in his objection to allow Madam Hawtrey, the widowed mother of his nephew Duke’s wife Bessy, to live in the Castle: “Sir Mark was obstinately against it; nor did he spare his caustic remarks on Madam Hawtrey, even before her own daughter” (P&C 4: 351-52). The reason for his objection lies in his doubt that the fulfilment of his latent wish for his daughter’s marriage to her childhood fiancé was hampered by Madam Hawtrey’s manoeuvre in the attempt to marry her

daughter to his nephew: "He had never quite forgiven Duke's marriage, although he was personally exceedingly fond of Bessy. He referred this marriage, in some part, and perhaps to no greater extent than was true, to madam's good management in throwing the young people together" (P&C 4: 352).

Principally, Sir Mark, Theresa's father, is drawn as always full of compassion towards his daughter. At the same time, his paternal affection is so strong as to make him not only "indulgent" (P&C 4: 346) to his daughter, but also self-centred and arrogant towards others who cannot understand the depth of his sorrow. He is unique among the parents in Gaskell's prodigal stories in facing life's difficulties with resorting neither to reading the scriptures nor to praying to God. So is Theresa among the sinners in them in having the same propensity. One of the primary themes in the prodigal stories is the author's implication of the possibility of the prodigal's earthly and heavenly redemption. In "Lizzie Leigh," Anne Leigh willingly forgives her prodigal daughter and expresses her hope for Lizzie's heavenly forgiveness. In "The Crooked Branch," the Huntroyd couples' willing forgiveness is neglected by their wicked son, and no implication of his heavenly salvation is inserted. In "Crowley Castle," Sir Mark is "anxious to show" his prodigal daughter "that all was forgiven" (P&C 4: 354), but few hints for her heavenly redemption are inserted as well. The following quotation from the scene depicting Theresa's bitter regret about "her ill-starred marriage" and Sir Mark's painful yearning for her daughter attracts the reader's attention because, although there is a reference to the parable of the Prodigal Son, there is no reference to Scriptures or God as the source of comfort for grievers.

Often and often she cried to herself, when she was alone in the dead of the night, "I cannot bear it—I cannot bear it!" But again in the

daylight her pride would help her to keep her woe to herself. She could not bear the gaze of pitying eyes; she could not bear even Victorine's fierce sympathy. She might have gone home like a poor prodigal to her father, if Duke and Bessy had not, as she imagined, reigned triumphant in her place, both in her father's heart and in her father's home. And all this while, that father almost hated the tender attentions which were rendered to him by those who were not his Theresa, his only child, for whose presence he yearned and longed in silent misery. (P&C 4: 352; emphasis added)

According to Table 2 which shows the frequency of occurrence of the Christian vocabulary in Gaskell's works by word count per million words, the occurrence rate in "Lizzie Leigh" is 3335.4 words, in "The Crooked Branch" 1584.0 words, and in "Crowley Castle" 1183.4 words. The reduction of biblical references in "Crowley Castle"—a discovery made by our biblical reading of the texts—seems to be endorsed by this statistical data. One of the few allusions to characters' faith in God is found in Duke's pleading with the dying Victorine to reply to his inquiry as to the validity of Theresa's involvement into her poisoning of Bessy: "for God's sake hold up your hand. And if you can do it with truth in this, your hour of dying, Lord have mercy upon you; but if you cannot hold up your hand, then Lord have mercy upon me!" (P&C 4: 364). The data should help somewhat to know the diminution of Gaskell's use of the scriptures and Christian faith as the source of comfort for her suffering characters.

If literature is a reflection of the complexities of human life which echoes the pattern of the life of the Prodigal Son and in the Plan of Salvation—a repentant sinner will certainly attain heavenly as well as earthly redemption—, no

implication of heavenly salvation signifies the author's device for leaving the judgement to the reader. This change of Gaskell's Christian approach to human nature from direct implication of salvation to indirect one during her 19-year career as a novelist should be an example of her technical advancement in fiction writing which requires careful observations of the complexity of a human being and also adequate consideration for the various types of her readers including non-Christians.

4.3. Conclusion

The necessarian theology, or the direct connection between cause and effect, is one of the principal creeds of Unitarianism (Webb, "The Gaskells" 163), and Chapple affirms this view by quoting "Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), famous scientist and leading Unitarian minister" ("Unitarian Dissent" 164), who preaches "a chain of cause and necessary consequence through which a benevolent God ensured that we could work out our own salvation on this earth" ("Unitarian Dissent" 165). Some critics may see "a chain of cause and necessary consequence" in Theresa's life where her puerile imprudence is one of the causes of her unhappy marriage. Bacigalupo, for instance, regards Theresa as "a victim of circumstances" (186). Before leaving on his grand tour, Duke asks his uncle's permission for him to be engaged to his daughter, but Sir Mark proposes its postponement until his return: "Leave her in peace with me . . . I should like to have her undivided heart until you come back" (P&C 4: 344). "In his reluctance to give up his daughter Theresa," says Bacigalupo, "Sir Mark Crowley sets into motion the main action of 'Crowley Castle'" (182): "Although a flawed character and youthful indiscretions play their parts in Theresa's gloomy fate, she is also a victim of circumstance. If Duke had declared his intentions before leaving on his Grand Tour, the heroine

might have avoided her first marriage; if Theresa had reached Dover before his ship set sail, she might have salvaged her second" (186).

A Christian reading of the text, nevertheless, reveals that the cause of her lonely death at the end is indistinct in light of her forbearance to painful sufferings and her subsequent penitent life. After experiences repeated afflictions, Theresa becomes a humble repentant, or morally good in a sense, but the ending prepared for her is unhappy and sorrowful. Why was it? Is it to show that the present life is not so simple and optimistic as described in "Lizzie Leigh"? The evocation of this feeling of unfairness, sympathy towards the protagonist, and hope for her salvation, in the reader's mind is actually what Gaskell aims at in this ending. Praising "Crowley Castle," Ward states, "The constructive skill with which the ultimate development of the plot is prepared, is notable from the first; and this . . . would have sufficed to show that it belongs to a relatively advanced period of Mrs. Gaskell's literary work" ("Introd." 7: xlii). Our analysis of the tale clarifies that it belongs to such a period in that the salvation of the prodigal is committed to the reader's discretion in contrast to "Lizzie Leigh" in which the authorial hints for the salvation are frequently incorporated into the text.

A child is used as a tool for making characters good. The death of Duke's heir child, for example, reminds his father of "the vanity of fame, as compared to a baby's life"; Theresa becomes "full of sympathy," and her heart "so tender"; Victorine regrets "the death in her own way" (P&C 4: 358). Towards the baby Mary comes out softness in the woman's nature of Victorine (P&C 4: 355). Theresa is "always kind and indulgent" (P&C 4: 359) towards Mary, three years old then, according to our chronology. Theresa "always had little Mary with her when there was a chance of the French waiting-maid coming in. For, the presence of the child

was a holy restraint even on Victorine's tongue" (P&C 4: 362). Both in "Crowley Castle" and "Lizzie Leigh," children are used as representing innocence, or a symbol of goodness. In the following words of regret of the erring but penitent mother Lizzie to her kind helper Susan Palmer, the contrast between her child Nanny's innocence and her own sin is explicit: "I am not worthy to touch her, I am so wicked" ("LL" 25). In *Mary Barton*, it is Christ's words of forgiveness "He did not know what he was doing" (Luke 23.34) quoted by a young girl injured by the careless action of a passing boy which awakens the hard-hearted capitalist John Carson to the search for his Bible, and finally to the forgiveness of the repentant labourer John Barton (*MB* 434-35). In *Ruth*, her "little innocent babe" Leonard is "God's messenger" to lead the repentant mother back to God: "Teach her (and God will teach her, if man does not come between) to reverence her child; and this reverence will shut out sin,—will be purification" (*RU* 119). In *Wives and Daughters*, it is the illness of the innocent child of Osborne Hamley which melts Squire Hamley's cold heart towards Aimée, the unwelcome wife of his son Osborne: "The squire and his daughter-in-law have got to be much better friends over the little fellow's sick-bed. . . . they took to crying together, and condoling with each other; and it was just like tearing down a curtain that had been between them; they have been rather friends than otherwise ever since" (*WD* 675). Chadwick observes that "Mrs. Gaskell always advocated the redeeming influence of a little child" (*Mrs Gaskell* 181); Duthie points out "the motif of the child as an agent of conciliation" in Gaskell's works (*Themes* 73). After stressing humbling oneself like a child is the key to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18.4; Luke 18.16), Jesus Christ observes, "whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me" (Matt. 18.5). Accordingly, Theresa and Victorine's tender approach to Mary Brownlow, the

three-year-old child of Duke and Bessy (P&C 4: 362), could be an authorial implication of their approach to Jesus Christ, or of their being accepted into the kingdom of heaven.

The Apostle Paul writes, we human beings are God's creation to be made to do good works: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2.10). We human beings can distinguish good from evil because we are the spiritual children of God; therefore, every human being should be saved if repentant—such Unitarian Universalism exists in the background of Gaskell's fiction. The author's method to incorporate this idea into her fiction differs according to its genre, theme, and the time it is written. Nonetheless, a hint for its possibility should be hidden somewhere in her works if the reading is attempted on them in terms of the parable of the Prodigal Son and the Plan of Salvation whose core idea is God's love for human beings.

CONCLUSION LITERATURE AS THEOLOGY

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyse Elizabeth Gaskell's three prodigal short stories—"Lizzie Leigh" (1850), "The Crooked Branch" (1859), and "Crowley Castle" (1863)—with reference to her major works in terms of the biblical parable of the Prodigal Son representing the principal Christian creed of the Plan of Salvation. The investigation into the three short stories discloses the following three main features. First, the repeated appearance of the total or partial pattern of the Prodigal Son's life—committing sin, repentance, and forgiveness—in her characters' lives and actions. Second, Gaskell's change of depicting the prodigal by gradually refraining from inserting hints for its salvation—there are many hints in the first story, almost none in the second, and few in the third. This change signifies the increase of her tendency to trust the reader's imagination and discretion on her implication of the possibility of the prodigals' salvation.³⁵ Third, her constant depictions of the unfathomness of parental compassion for the prodigal which implies there is no change in her faith in the Christian teaching of love for the suffered, or God's love for His children.

The focus of "Lizzie Leigh" is placed on the prodigal's repentance and the limitless forgiveness of her sin by her mother Anne and her brother Will's love

³⁵ In this artistic device of Gaskell, some readers might find the influence of sensation fiction in which concealment, "by leaving readers breathless for the next magazine instalment and a further glimpse of the secret driving the plot," shapes the plot itself (Linda K. Hughes, "Modernity" 105-06). As hinted at in "Lizzie Leigh," in salvation, there are two types: earthly and heavenly. Lizzie's being forgiven by her family signifies the former, and her mother's belief in God's promise to the penitent the latter. In "The Crooked Branch," there is no specific allusion to the earthly and heavenly salvation of sinful Benjamin. So is that of repentant Theresa in "Crowley Castle." If our reading of Gaskell's works as using the parable of the Prodigal Son, which Jesus told to suggest God's mercy for His children and their heavenly salvation, as the framework of the plots, is right, concealment of the reference to the salvation of Benjamin and Theresa put readers in suspense. In this sense, the influence of sensation fiction might be able to be found in this artistic design of Gaskell.

Susan Palmer. The salvation of the prodigal is implied by the narratorial insertion like “Many hearts bless Lizzie Leigh, but she—she prays always and ever for forgiveness—such forgiveness as may enable her to see her child once more” (“LL” 31), and by its confirmation to Lizzie by her mother “the interpreter of God’s will” (“LL” 22) that “thou shalt have it [the dead baby Nanny] again in Heaven” (“LL” 30). “The Crooked Branch” centres on the depth of the love of the parents Nathan and Hester Huntroyd and their niece Bessy for the prodigal Benjamin, whose evilness is emphasized throughout the story. No mention is made on his salvation. “Crowley Castle” delineates the life of the prodigal Theresa Crowley from her childhood to her death, and makes no clear reference to her salvation, emphasizing her second husband Duke’s unjust treatment of her, probably to draw the reader’s sympathy to the prodigal. Thus, the narrator aims for her salvation to be remembered in the reader’s mind instead of inserting its implication in the text as was done in “Lizzie Leigh.” From direct suggestion to indirect suggestion should be the result of Gaskell’s advancement of her technique as a novelist.

In contrast, the parents’ Christ-like unfathomable forgiveness shows no change from “Lizzie Leigh” to “Crowley Castle.” Anne Leigh, the Huntroyds, and Sir Mark are always compassionate towards their erring children. Evilness of the prodigal is scarcely mentioned in “Lizzie Leigh”; it is in strong contrast with his parents’ goodness in “The Crooked Branch”; it is briefly depicted in the Paris scene in “Crowley Castle.” Life on earth may not go on ideally. Some prodigals may be in repentance and will be saved, some are under too strong satanic temptation to show no sign of repentance, and others may have to suffer life’s hardships even if in repentance. Quoting the words of Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808), “founder of the first Unitarian church in Essex Street, London” (Nectoux 12; Saracino,

“Interpreting” 111),—God “never ordains or permits evil but with a view to the production of a greater good, which could not have existed without it”—, Lansbury presumes “the suffering that men saw as evil . . . was, in effect, part of God’s plan for a greater goodness” (*Social Crisis* 13-14). Lansbury’s understanding of the meaning of life’s sufferings is a mirror of Jesus’s explanation of the reason for a blind man’s sufferings: “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9.3).

To note is that one more character who shows compassion towards the prodigal is prepared in each story. This is Gaskell’s unique device since there appears no such character in the scriptural parable of the Prodigal Son. The sympathizers are the kind neighbour Susan Palmer in “Lizzie Leigh,” the prodigal’s fiancée Bessy Rose in “The Crooked Branch,” and the French nurse Victorine in “Crowley Castle.” They are common in the warm sympathy for their prodigals, but are different in their action to show their sympathy. Susan and Bessy are always virtuous, but Victorine becomes sinful. Susan shows deep compassion towards the repentant sinner Lizzie, her child Nanny, and her mother Anne Leigh. Bessy helps Benjamin’s escape not only because of her love for her old fiancé, but rather because of her tenderness for his old parents’ affection for him. Victorine, notwithstanding, loves her mistress Theresa so intensely as to commit a crime of poisoning her rival in love Bessy Crowley. Only in the case of Victorine, the sympathizer’s unswerving devotion for the prodigal contains satanic evil.³⁶ The creation of a

³⁶ As discussed in Note 25 in Section 3.5.2, there is a conflict between the Unitarian reservation about the existence of the devil and the scriptural emphasis on its existence as a real being. George Eliot, for instance, alludes to the devil in her letter to her evangelist teacher Maria Lewis dated 20 May 1839 as if its existence were a natural thing: “Satan is too crafty to the hands of those who have nothing to recommend them to approbation” (Haight, *G. Eliot Letters* 1: 26). Since one of the essential objectives of my dissertation is to explore the biblical truth in Gaskell’s works, the term “satanic evil” is used in the sense of the latter.

sympathizer is probably the requirement of the author's structural design. In "Lizzie Leigh," one of Gaskell's authorial meanings is to lead the public to reconsider its patriarchal strictness towards fallen women like Lizzie. Her brother Will is a representative of such a society. An important role of making him relent is given to merciful Susan, through whom Gaskell arouses the Christian spirit of compassion in his mind. In "The Crooked Branch," one of the author's meanings is to pose a question as to why good people are not necessarily rewarded for their goodness by depicting the satanic cruelty of the profligate Benjamin and his parents' Christ-like compassion in vivid contrast. By creating Bessy his fiancée, who shows as strong compassion towards him as the old couple's but goes as equally unrewarded for kindness as they do, Gaskell succeeds in enhancing the horror of demon-possessed man, the depth of God's patient love for such a sinner, and the meaning of the author's message incorporated into the last sentence of the tale where she implies good people will certainly be rewarded for their good intention. One of Gaskell's authorial meanings for "Crowley Castle" is to describe the sorrow of a penitent sinner who is unrewarded for her humble and serious life. Theresa's happiness in married life is broken by the leaving of her husband Duke, who innocently but unreasonably believes the confession of Victorine her old devoted French nurse that Theresa is her accomplice in poisoning his former wife Bessy Hawtrey. The sense of Theresa's devastation is reinforced by the fact that the confession is made by her faithful servant's misunderstanding of being tricked by the mistress of her lifelong devotion. Accordingly, each of the three sympathizers is closely interwoven into the plot to heighten the effect of Gaskell's thematic message. The above analysis of the functions of the key characters is summarized in Table 1.

	"Lizzie Leigh" (1850)	"The Crooked Branch" (1859)	"The Crowley Castle" (1863)
Prodigal	Lizzie Leigh (full repentance, salvation implied)	Benjamin Huntroyd (no repentance, no reference to salvation)	Theresa Crowley (repentance, salvation implied in the reader's mind)
Father	James Leigh (dead; strict, compassion)	Nathan Huntroyd (full compassion, justice)	Sir Mark Crowley (full compassion, human weakness)
Mother	Anne Leigh (full compassion)	Hester Huntroyd (full compassion)	Amelia Crowley (dead)
Sympathizer	Susan Palmer (full compassion, integrity)	Bessy Rose (full compassion)	Victorine (devotion, murder)

Table 1. Key Characters in Gaskell's Three Short Stories of the Prodigal

What Gaskell learned through experiences to make her religious commitment aesthetic and artistic is to refrain from inserting straightforward Christian messages into her texts, and thus to use readers' imagination rather than their emotion to obtain her purposes. In "The Crooked Branch," which was published in the second stage of her career (1854-59), Gaskell's tendency of moralization becomes less conspicuous. Describing such a "more sinister villain" like Benjamin "than many of the other degenerate young men who people Gaskell's fiction" (Baker, "Intro." ix), our author refrains from expressing her view of the possibility of his salvation, and, simply by posing a question why his parents and fiancée are hardly rewarded for their selfless devotion to the prodigal, lets readers draw their own conclusion about the possibility. Also in "Crowley Castle," a work produced in the third stage of her career (1860-65), Gaskell's artistic shift is maintained. The possibility of salvation of the prodigal Theresa is purposefully inexplicit, and so is that of her old, loyal nurse Victorine, who commits murder primarily for the sake of her lady mistress's happiness. The reader is led to wonder

about the meanings of not only the seemingly unreasonable death of the repentant prodigal but also of the crime of the devotional servant. Highlighted is the complexity of human beings who sometimes become weak enough to yield easily to Satan's temptations.³⁷

God's Plan of Salvation is one of the principal Christian doctrines concerning the premortal, mortal, and postmortal world, which includes the belief in human beings as God's spirit children, goodness of our spirit, temptation of Satan, sin, repentance, Christ's atonement, God's redemption of penitent sinners, resurrection, and eternal life. This doctrine is shared by most Christians irrespective of their denominations, including the Unitarians, Gaskell's denomination, as indicated in a note in Introduction of this dissertation. Unitarianism has been criticized by Trinitarianism for its scepticism about miracles, or something incomprehensible to human understanding, such as "the counsel of Jehovah, and the plan of his salvation" ("General Preface," *UD* vi). However, Unitarian ministers defend their creed by saying that "the miraculous conception *in no way interfered with Unitarianism*" ("General Preface," *UD* iii), and that "Until we touch upon the mysterious, we are not in contact with religion" ("General Preface," *UD* vi-vii). Unitarians' belief in resurrection is hinted at in Webb's quotation from the 18th-century "theologian and natural philosopher" (1733-1804) as "a vigorous advocate of Unitarianism" ("Priestley," *DNB*). Joseph "Priestley's radical Christology" which

³⁷ Needless to say, there should be various reasons for a character's negative actions—psychological, sociological, biographical, or historical. In case of John Barton, for instance, the reason for his murder of the mill owner may hardly be understood without paying attention to the political, social, and historical background of the 1830s and 40s Manchester, as has been pointed out by such critics as Uglow (*EG* 139), J. G. Sharps (*O&I* 59), and Shirley Foster (*EG* 35). At the same time, however, any human action, when its morality becomes a topic of discussion, is closely linked to religion, as the historian Dorothy Mermin observes, "The center of Victorian discourse," historical or political, "in which all questions were implicated and to which all roads lead, was religion" (qtd. in Richard Hughes Gibson, *Forgiveness in Victorian Literature* 4). Accordingly, Barton's assassination can be construed as his yielding to satanic temptation, against which the Bible gives us repeated warnings (2 Thess. 2.9; 1 Cor. 7.5; 2 Cor. 2.10-11; 1 Tim. 5.14-15).

retains “two indispensable biblical elements to buttress the Unitarian claim to be Christian: the historical evidence of miracles (or such as withstood critical tests) as testimony to the divinity of Christ’s mission and the similarly attested fact of His resurrection, which carried with it the promise of our own resurrection, though we could not know the means by which an individual, immortal soul, dying with the body, would put on immortality” (“The Gaskells” 145). “Elizabeth Gaskell had no doubt that in the life hereafter (and not in Hell-fire) . . . all of us, would attain final salvation” (Webb, “The Gaskells” 165) is a succinct summary of her Christianity.

Gaskell is indeed a Christian moralist, which is confessed by the author herself in a letter when she writes about the busy life she is experiencing after the move to her new house at Plymouth Grove as if she needed several selves to cope with the hectic situation—one of them is her Christian self: “One of my mes [selves] is, I do believe, a true Christian” (*Letters* 108). Spotlighting her insightful and dexterous utilization of the language of the Bible, Rosemary Kolich asserts that “Elizabeth Gaskell viewed all of life and relationships through the lens of the Bible, and as she drew on Scripture, she could be as playful and lighthearted as she could be profound and poignant” (90), and that “Scripture . . . provided anchor points in her thinking about” human life (93). Inseparability between literature and theology in the interpretation of Gaskell’s works has been pointed out by many critics. For example, Wheeler states that, in the Victorian period, “the ‘literary’ and the ‘theological’ are inextricably mixed, and are not to be violently separated and compartmentalized” (“Unitarianism” 26). Wheeler’s view is shared by Tousseint-Thiriet: “her works were the parables through which she expressed her belief

in God's love and tried to teach men to help one another in a true spirit of Christian charity" (66).³⁸

Some critics claims that literature, whether sacred or secular, is a projection of the Christian doctrine. This view is endorsed by many intellectuals.³⁹ If so, inspection of the pattern of the parable of the Prodigal Son as a part of the Plan of Salvation in the interpretation of literary works could be an effective approach to

³⁸ For other interpretations of Gaskell's literature as a projection of her theology, see Fryckstedt (88-89), Craik ("LLW" 31), A. Sanders ("Religious Experience" 19-21), Mary Lou Brooks Howell (11, 12, 22), Merryn Williams (118), Bacigalupo (16, 128), Nectoux (103), Millard (10), and Knight and Mason (77). One of the most significant summaries of the inseparability between literature and theology in the interpretation of Gaskell's works would be Wheeler's: "Gaskell . . . in her novels expresses best what she perhaps perceived from the start: that 'works' are the outward and visible sign of true belief within" ("Unitarianism" 31; *MB&RU* 25-26). As the above review of previous criticism on Gaskell's religion show, her Christian ethics expressed through her story-lines has long been one of the topics which attracts critics' interest. The uniqueness of this study taking more or less a similar Christian approach to her fiction, if any, would be an attempt to argue that there is the total or partial pattern of the scriptural parable of the Prodigal Son representing the key Christian doctrine of the Plan of Salvation—repentant sinners will be saved in the postmortal as well as mortal worlds since this is God's plan for saving His spirit children, or human beings—as the backbone structure of most of her major works.

³⁹ Nicholas Boyle, the Catholic scholar of Germany literature at the University of Cambridge, for instance, insists that "if we believe the teachings of the Catholic church to be true statements about human life, then we must necessarily expect literature that is true to life to reflect and corroborate them, whether or not it is written by Catholics" (139). In support of the view of all literature being a reflection of the Christian doctrine, he continues that "Even in the works and words that seem to hide God's face, or to spit on it, we can see God revealed at the heart of our world and in our culture" (Boyle 145). Boyle states that "literature is the site of theology because literature, biblical and nonbiblical, is a place where sacred and secular meet" (7). In "the words of noncanonical and even non-Christian writings," he continues, "something . . . of the moral *and doctrinal* instruction to be found in sacred scripture" is found (7). Common sense would lead us to the validity of his assertion, as literature is after all a study of human beings who are, according to the Bible, "the children of God" (Rom. 8.16). "The words of Christian sacred texts are in permanent intercourse with the words of texts that are not sacred" (Boyle 8). If so, our unique interpretation of most of Gaskell's works as a reflection of the prodigal pattern—total or partial—might not be so unique, since it is just a verification of Boyle's assertion. As for the 19th-century notion of literature as a means for the expression of moral messages, Uglow observes of Gaskell that, "By using her art as the vehicle for her belief, writing became a religious exercise and therefore 'permissible', reflecting a feeling which had lingered on from the eighteenth century that novels were somehow frivolous and corrupting unless they had a clear moral or spiritual message" (*EG* 134). Styler writes that in "the nineteenth century, literature was recognized to have particular strengths as a theological method," because it can "engage the reader's sensibilities more persuasively than dry intellectual discourse" including "the traditional sermon or treatise" as it appeals to "the imagination and emotions," and that thus faith "is embodied in narrative patterns and characters to whom the reader is drawn through empathetic response" (*Literary Theology* 3). "Like many other Victorians," including the Brontë sisters and George Eliot, Gaskell sees "fiction as a way of leading people to unpalatable truths" (Carol A. Martin 32). Emma Mason brings into notice the gradual prevalence of a theological approach to literature or vice versa among critics in the present age: "Critics who seek to pursue a religious idea in a literary text or assess the literary aesthetic of a religious idea now find themselves in a thriving community served by journals, companions, readers and monograph series" ("Rethinking," *Abrahamic Faiths* 7).

the pursuit of the truth of our life since literature is fundamentally the reflection of various aspects of human life which, if the Christian belief is true, proceeds in accordance with the Plan of Redemption.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 The Christian Vocabulary in Gaskell's Works

It has been pointed out by critics that Gaskell's didacticism especially in her early novels *Mary Barton*, *Ruth*, and *North and South* decreases as her artistic techniques increase. Aina Rubenius, for example, explains the diminution of Gaskell's didacticism from a mathematical angle, i.e. the decrease of its frequency: "One indication of this is that the Bible quotations so profusely used in *Mary Barton* to emphasize moral exhortations have almost entirely disappeared in *Wives and Daughters*" (87). The decrease of scriptural references suggested by Rubenius is championed by a simple counting of the frequency of the Bible-related words—bible(s), scripture(s), testament, and gospel(s)—which shows that they appear 22 times in *Mary Barton*, while six times in *Wives and Daughters*.

On the other hand, there are a few critics who point out the prevalence of Gaskell's didactic tone in describing Christian morality throughout her entire works, early or late. For instance, Carroll states "I would suggest that her religion pervades all of her writings, and that the influence of Unitarianism in her writing is not confined to the social problem novels" (24). So does Uglow: "a preoccupation with education and upbringing" is "a theme of Elizabeth's writings from her earliest stories to her final novel" (*EG* 5). Craik insists that "knowledge of the Bible . . . affects the whole of life and conduct, whether by influence or absence" not only in *Mary Barton* and *North and South* but also in *Cousin Phillis* and *Sylvia's Lovers* ("LLCP" 68). Carroll's assertion is drawn from her analysis of the image of gardens in Gaskell's texts which "could both educate and encourage individual thought" (25, 28); Uglow's remark is inserted into her explanation of the history of Unitarianism (*EG* 5); Craik's view is expressed to point out the biblical concerns

common to the four works. The three critics' interpretations are all based on their insightful readings.

As seen above, there seems a debate regarding the diminution of Gaskell's moral didacticism. In order to find a hint for solution, an investigation was made into the frequency of occurrence of the Christian vocabulary ("god," "almighty," "christ," "saviour," "redeemer," "lord," "heaven," "holy ghost/spirit," "bible," "bibles," "scripture," "scriptures," "testament," "gospel," "gospels," and "church") in each of her works which were arranged in the order of their publication dates.⁴⁰ Table 2 was created to examine the transition of the words' frequency in accordance with the publication dates of Gaskell's works by word count and per million words. Fig. 1 is a visualization of the result of its examination per million words. The calculation of the latter was made according to the following formula.

$$\frac{\text{Total Number of Occurrences of the Christianity – Related Words in a Work}}{\text{Total Number of Its Word Token}} \times 1,000,000$$

The survey of the frequency of occurrence of the Christian vocabulary by word count indicates that the frequency decreases as the stage advances: 941 times in Stage 1, 730 in Stage 2, and 492 in Stage 3. Its survey per million words produces a similar result: 42,201 times in Stage 1, 21,915 in Stage 2, and 7,031 in Stage 3. At the same time, Table 2 and Fig. 1 betoken that the Christian vocabulary appears continuously even in her works published in the later years, and also that a few works in Stage 3 record high frequencies of its occurrence. A solution to the debate as to the validity of the conventional reading of the gradual decrease of Gaskell's

⁴⁰ 76 examples of "Lord" attached to "Lord Cumnor" and 62 to "Lord Hollingford" are excluded from the total frequency of occurrence of "lord" in *Wives and Daughters*. So are 18 instances attached to "Lord Ludlow" from that in *My Lady Ludlow*.

moralization shall be sought by a detailed analysis of the scriptural elements in her texts especially in the following Chapters of this dissertation.

To judge the diminution of moral didacticism simply by whether its integration into the plot is aesthetically effective or not is liable to fall into subjectivity. Barbara Hardy claims that the total assimilation can be found in “the two great novels of the artist’s maturity,” i.e. *Sylvia’s Lovers* and *Wives and Daughters*, where “her moral and political didacticism is totally assimilated to character, feeling and setting” (“The Art of Novella” 27). Pollard, on the other hand, asserts that the natural assimilation of Gaskell’s moralization can be found even in her first novel *Mary Barton*: “unsatisfying though it is in its rather obvious didacticism, the reconciliation at the end is fully in tune with Mrs Gaskell’s attitude throughout the novel” (“Faith” 4). Pollard’s reading implies the full integration of moral didacticism into the plot, i.e. the diminution of moralization or the advanced artistic technique, can be detected even in the early stage of Gaskell’s career. Needless to say, therefore, a careful and detailed analysis of the biblical elements in the texts is required for this dissertation to make a balanced judgement on the permeation of Gaskell’s moralization.

Stage	Period	ID	Publication Date	Genre	Works	WC	PMW
1	1837-53	1	18370101	p	"Sketches among the Poor No. 1"	1	829.1873964
		2	18400101	s	"Clopton Hall"	3	2483.443709
		3	18470101_n.d	s	"Two Fragments of Ghost Stories"	0	0
		4	18470705	s	"Libbie Marsh's Three Eras"	24	2140.181915
		5	18470904	s	"The Sexton's Hero"	18	3979.659518
		6	18480101	s	"Christmas Storms and Sunshine"	5	1076.194576
		7	18481018	n	<i>Mary Barton</i>	230	1390.517877
		8	18490701	s	"Hand and Heart"	10	1215.657671
		9	18490701	s	"The Last Generation in England"	0	0
		10	18500201	s	"Martha Preston"	11	1964.987496
		11	18500330	s	"Lizzie Leigh"	44	3336.366394
		12	18501116	s	"The Well of Pen-Morfa"	29	3144.654088
		13	18501214	s	"The Moorland Cottage"	53	1247.440394
		14	18501228	s	"The Heart of John Middleton"	54	5281.690141
		15	18510201	s	"Mr Harrison's Confessions"	8	266.9959617
		16	18510707	s	"Disappearances"	1	238.1519409
		17	18511213	n	<i>Cranford</i>	56	773.6195726
		18	18520101	s	"Bessy's Troubles at Home"	5	606.1340769
		19	18520619	s	"The Shah's English Gardener"	0	0
		20	18521225	s	"The Old Nurse's Story"	46	4691.962464
		21	18530101	n	<i>Ruth</i>	293	1778.970504
		22	18530122	s	"Cumberland Sheep Shearers"	1	162.2849724
		23	18531119	s	"Morton Hall"	19	1103.688644
		24	18531119	s	"Traits and Stories of the Hugue- nots"	11	1964.285714
		25	18531217	s	"My French Master"	7	719.9424046
		26	18531225	s	"The Squire's Story"	12	1805.054152
Sub-Total						941	42201.07158
2	1854-59	27	18540201	s	"Modern Greek Songs"	5	681.9421713
		28	18540520	s	"Company Manners"	0	0
		29	18540902	n	<i>North and South</i>	132	704.785601
		30	18550825	s	"An Accursed Race"	18	2747.672111
		31	18551006	s	"Half a Long-Time Ago"	8	438.1880922
		32	18560101	s	"The Half-Brothers"	5	950.209046
		33	18561213	s	"The Poor Clare"	21	914.9130833
		34	18570301	n	<i>The Life of Charlotte Brontë</i>	236	1323.537659
		35	18580101	s	"The Doom of the Griffiths"	11	748.1975241
		36	18580601	s	"An Incident at Niagara Falls"	11	5549.949546
		37	18580619	n	<i>My Lady Ludlow</i>	123	1558.876088
		38	18581127	s	"Right at Last"	2	250.9725185
		39	18581207	s	"The Manchester Marriage"	13	1112.63266
		40	18590101	s	"Round the Sofa"	1	260.3488675
		41	18591008	s	"Lois the Witch"	114	3088.928629
		42	18591225	s	"The Crooked Branch"	30	1584.032948
Sub-Total						730	21915.18655
3	1860-65	43	18600201	s	"Curious, If True"	3	445.8314757
		44	18610105	s	"The Grey Woman"	5	210.6593638
		45	18620501	s	"Six Weeks at Heppenheim"	11	697.2174685
		46	18630124	n	<i>A Dark Night's Work</i>	53	772.6848612
		47	18630201	n	<i>Sylvia's Lovers</i>	203	1030.749858
		48	18630201	s	"Shams"	3	557.1030641
		49	18630321	s	"An Italian Institution"	1	289.7710808
		50	18631101	s	<i>Cousin Phillis</i>	39	946.7398165
		51	18631115	s	"Crowley Castle"	17	1183.431953
		52	18631128	s	"The Cage at Cranford"	0	0
		53	18640401	s	"French Life"	11	374.748748
		54	18640801	n	<i>Wives and Daughters</i>	146	522.393133
Sub-Total						492	7031.330822
Total						2163	71147.58895

Table 2. Frequency of Occurrence of the Christian Vocabulary in Gaskell's Works by Word Count and per Million Words

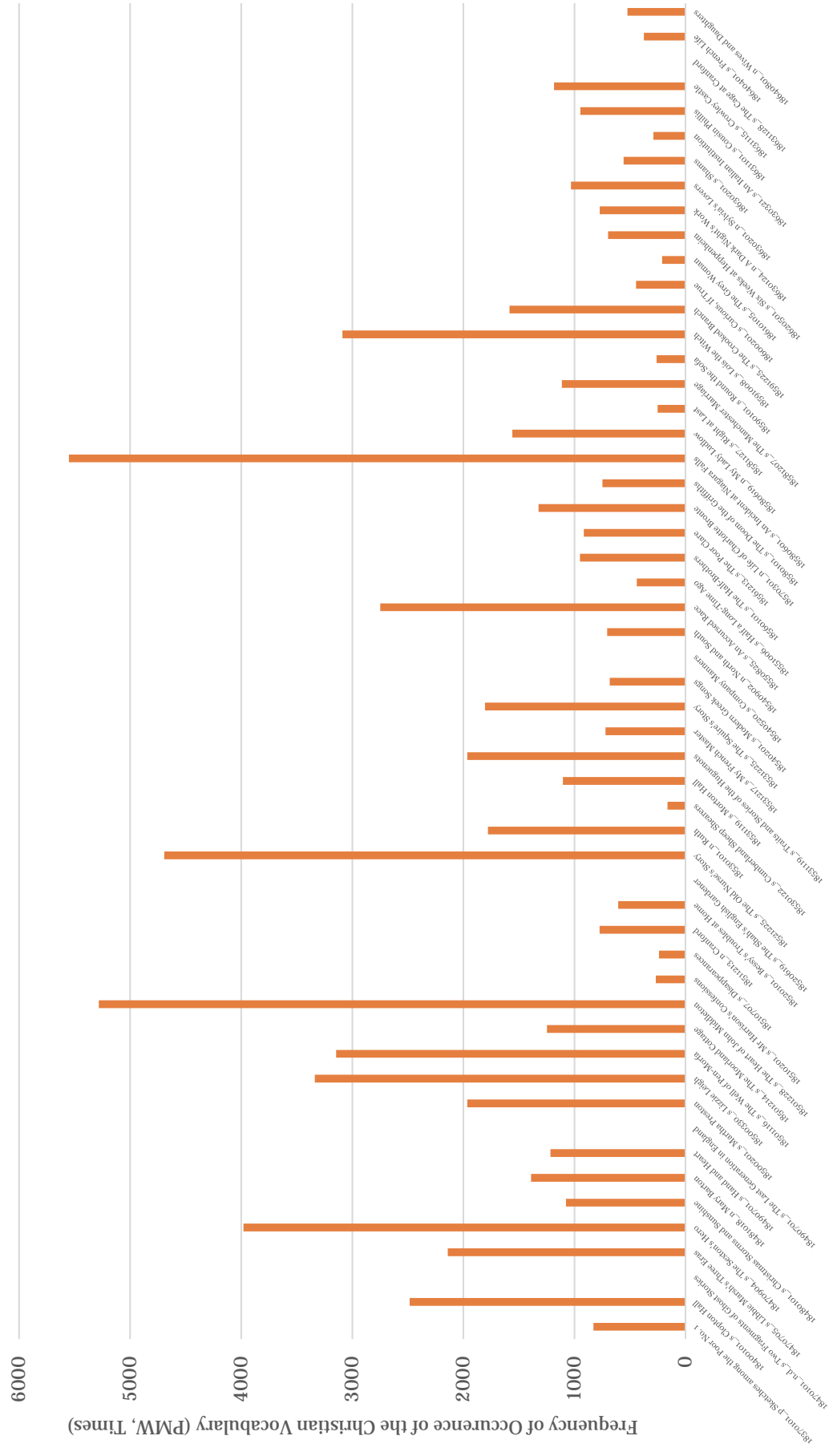
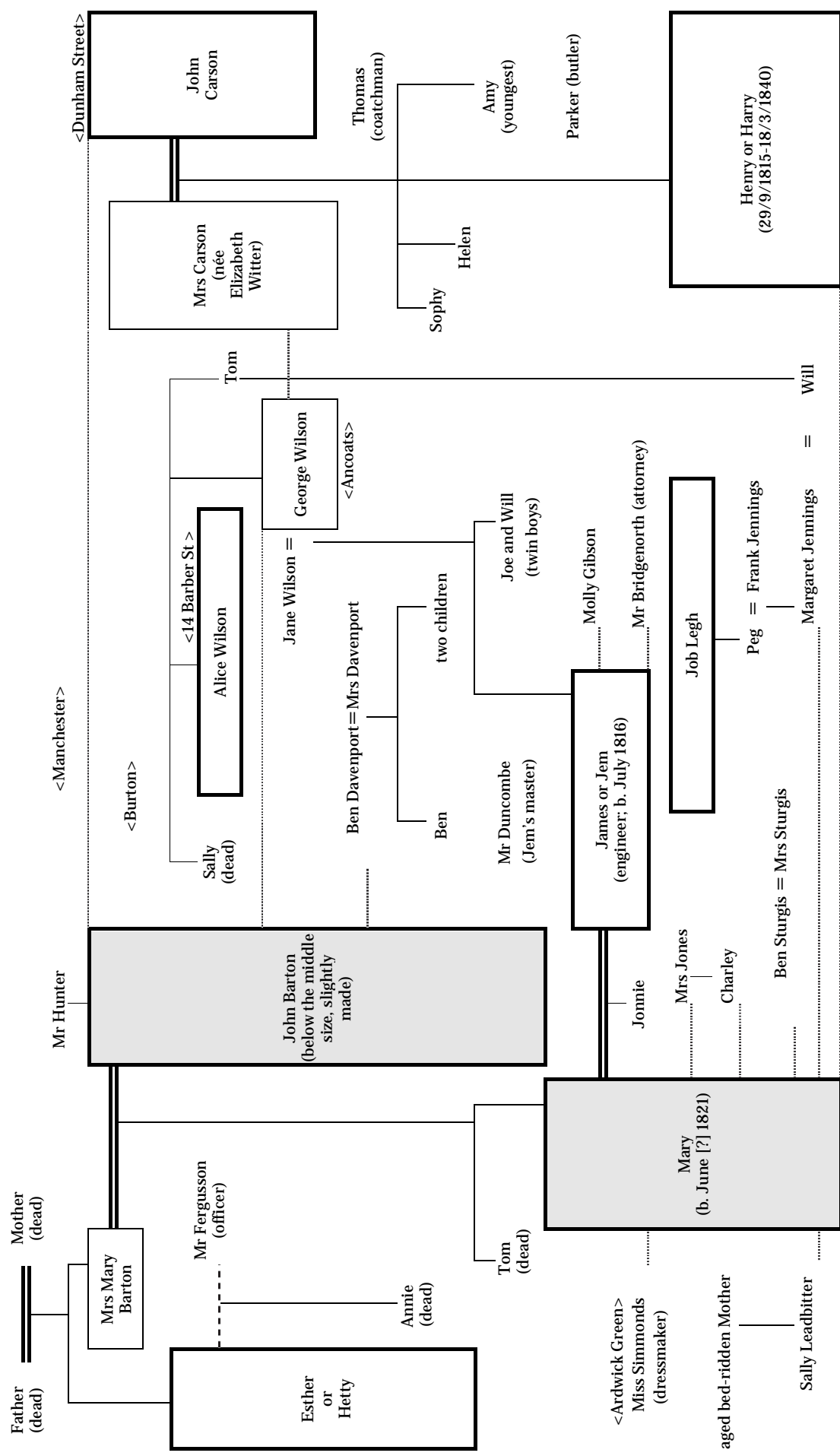


Fig. 1. Frequency of Occurrence of the Christian Vocabulary in Gaskell's Works in the Order of Publication Date (per Million Words)

APPENDIX 2 Characters' Correlation Diagrams



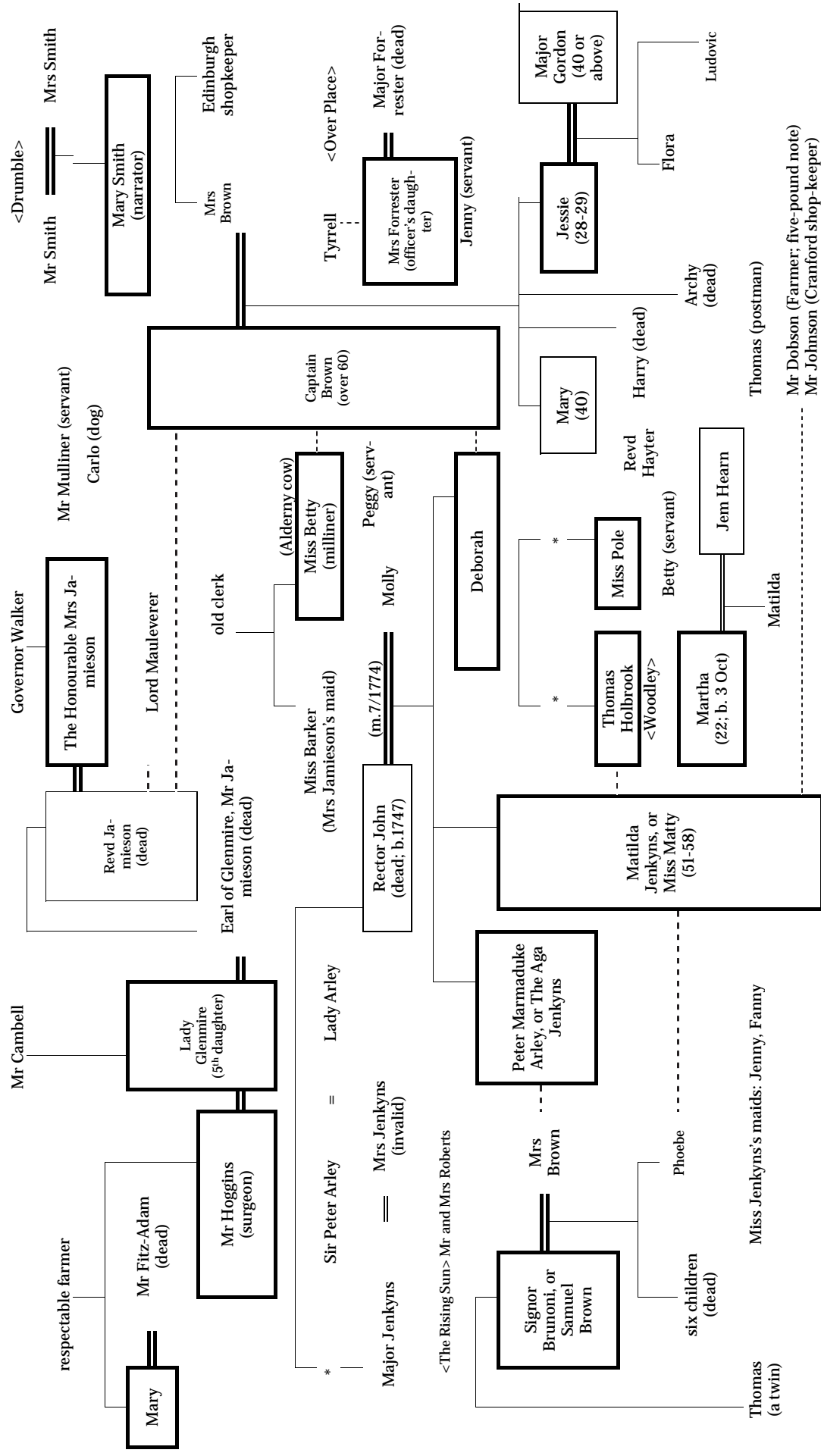
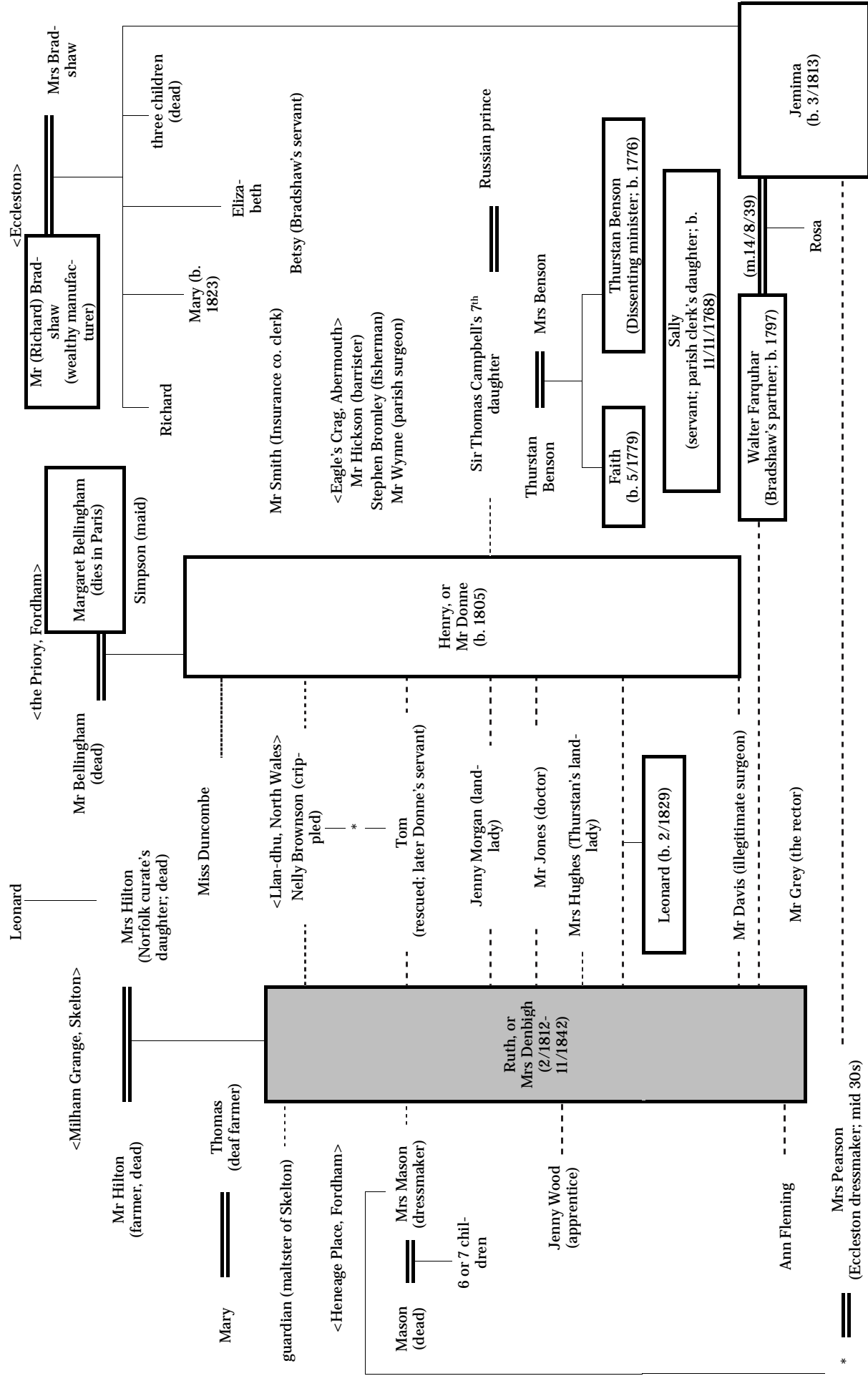


Fig. 3. Characters' Correlation Diagram for Cranford



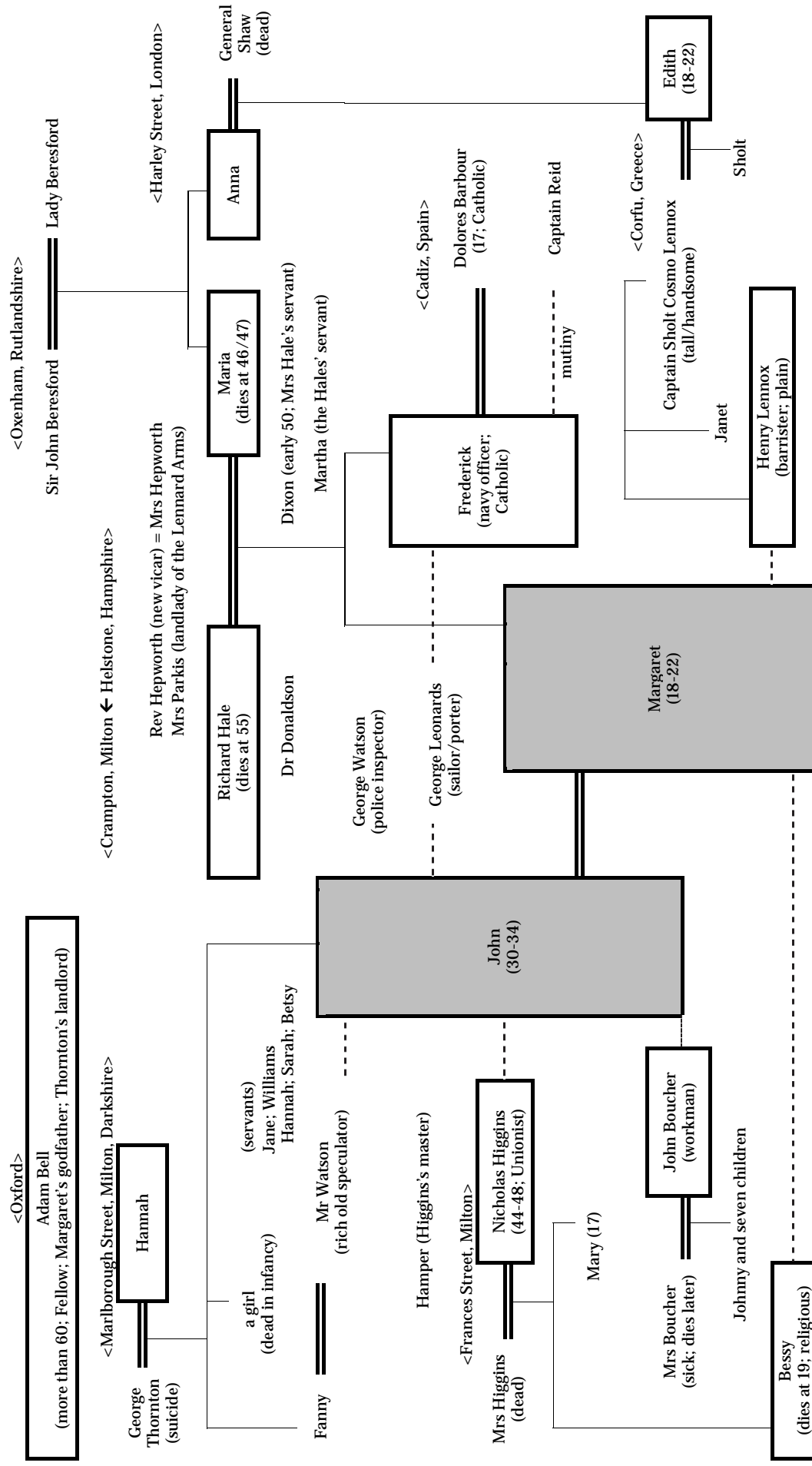


Fig. 5. Characters' Correlation Diagram for North and South

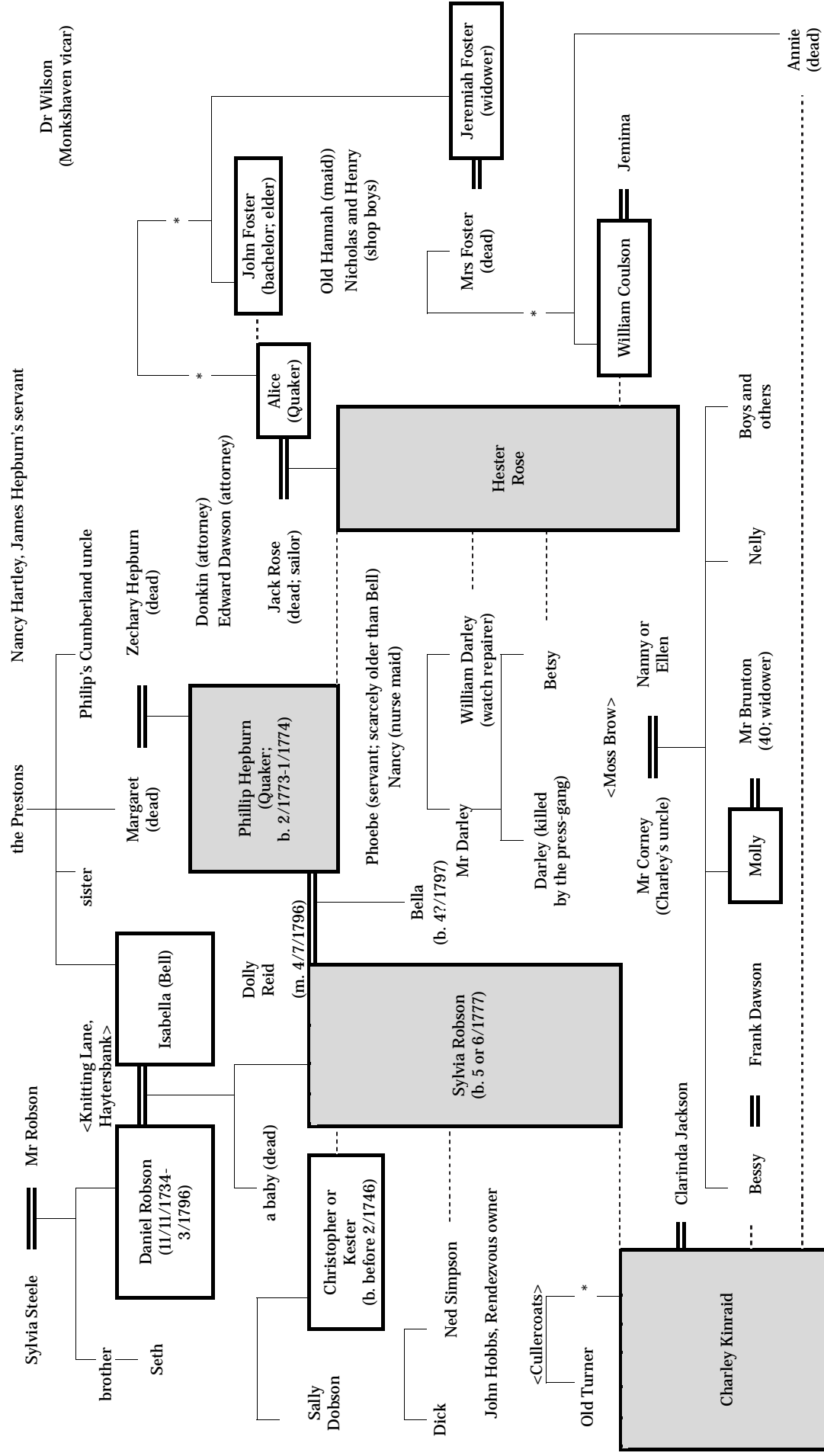


Fig. 6. Characters' Correlation Diagram for Sylvia's Lovers

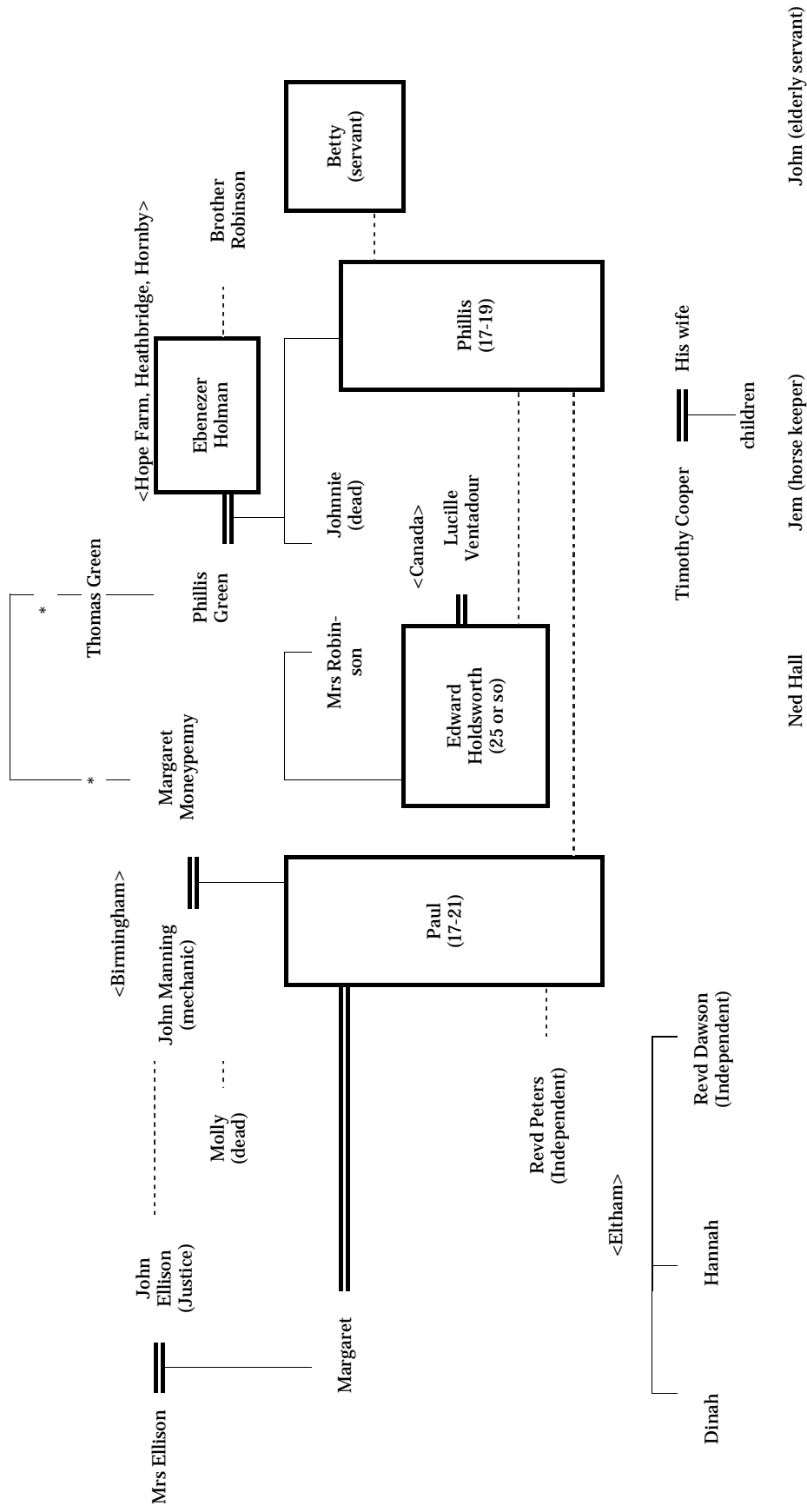
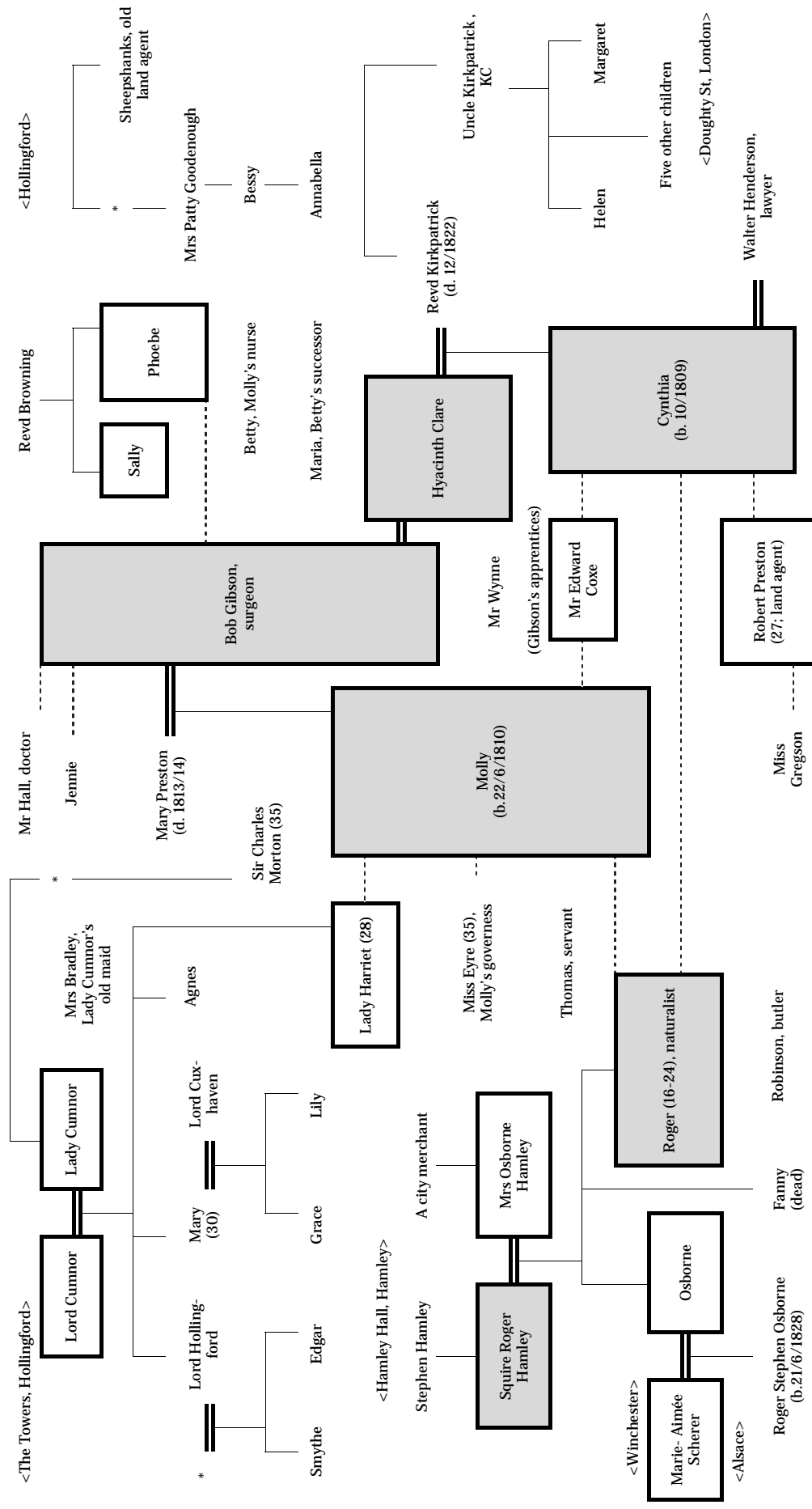


Fig. 7. Characters' Correlation Diagram for Cousin Phillis



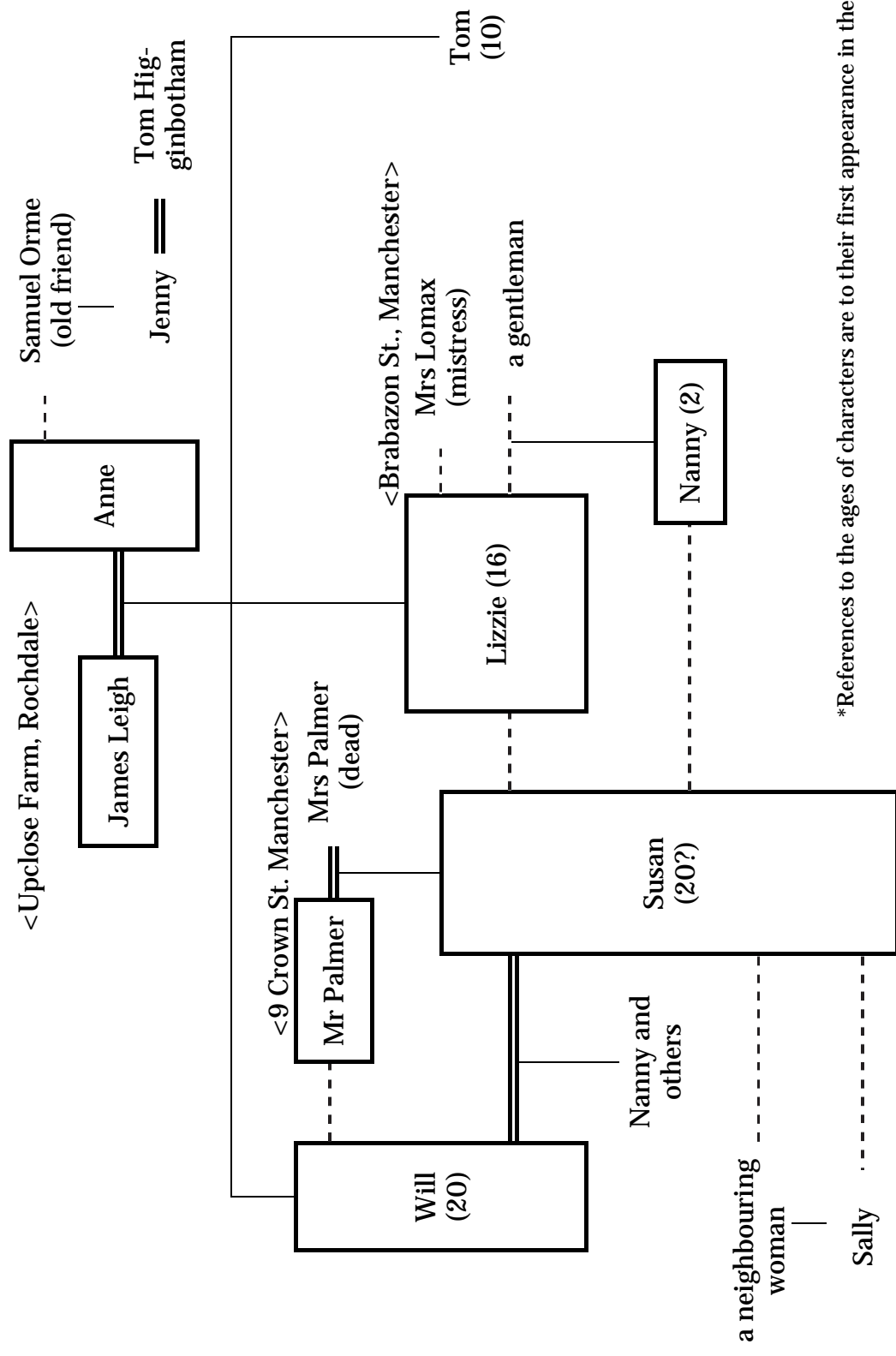
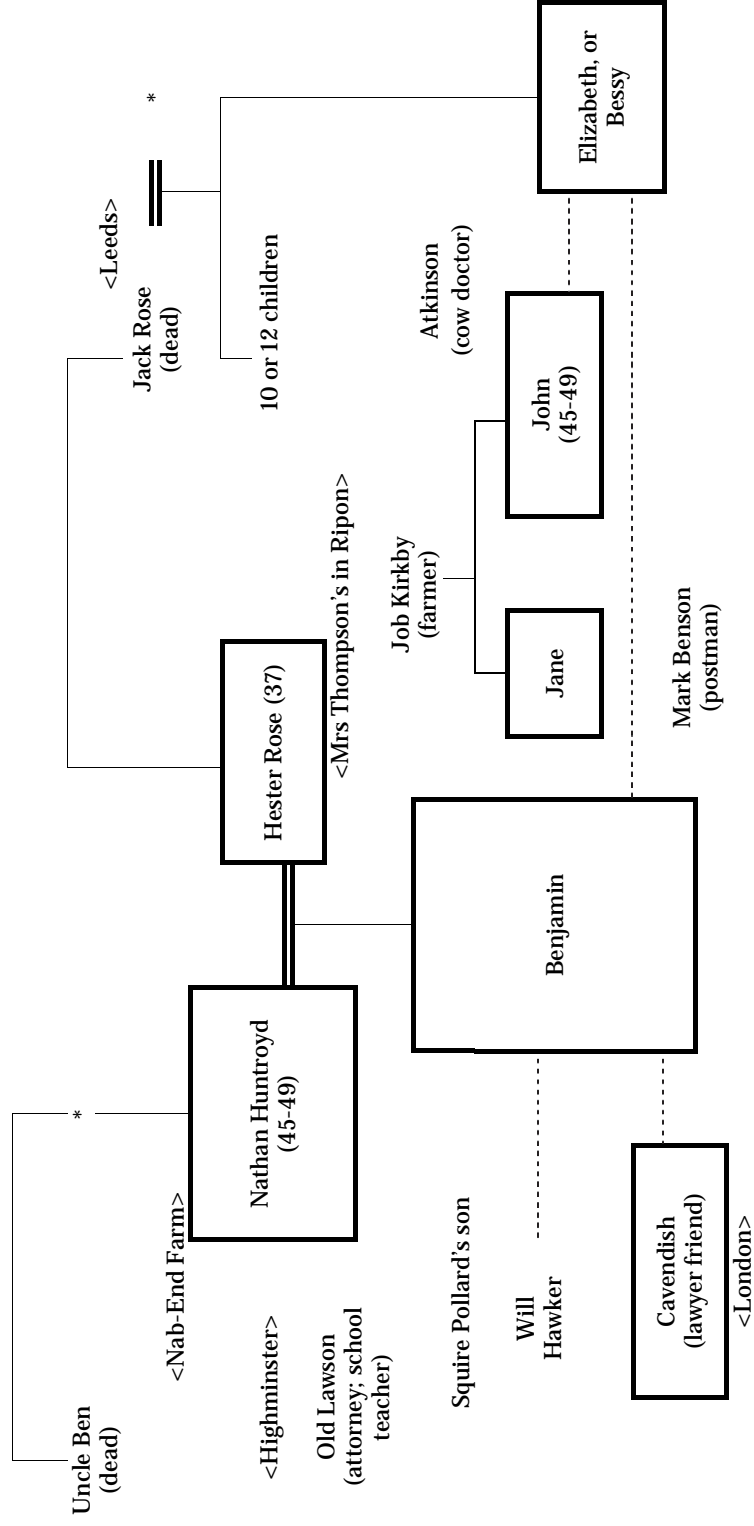


Fig. 9. Characters' Correlation Diagram for "Lizzie Leigh"



*References to the ages of characters are to their first appearance in the text.

Fig. 10. Characters' Correlation Diagram for "The Crooked Branch"

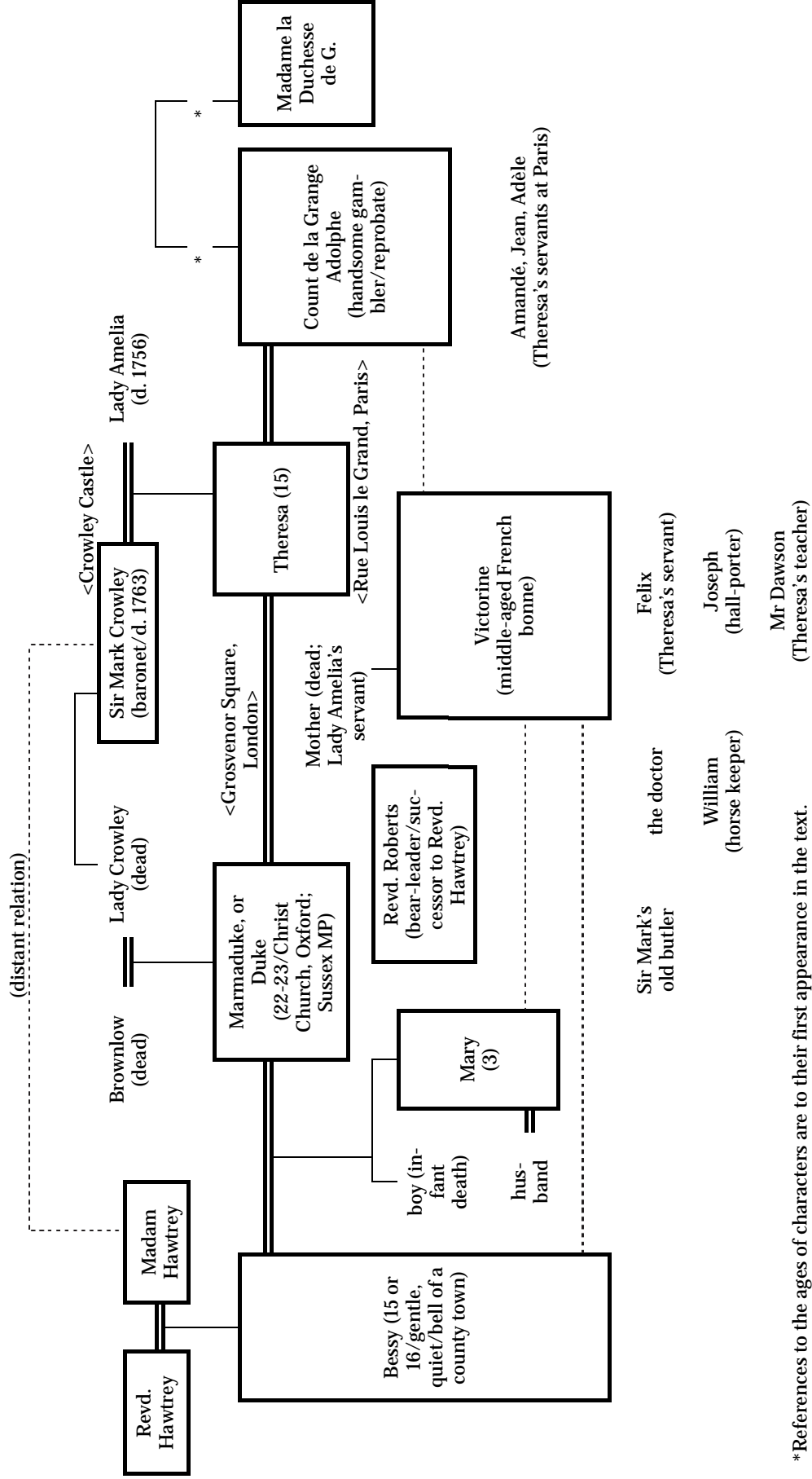


Fig. 11. Characters' Correlation Diagram for "Crowley Castle"

APPENDIX 3 Characters' Appearance in "Lizzie Leigh"

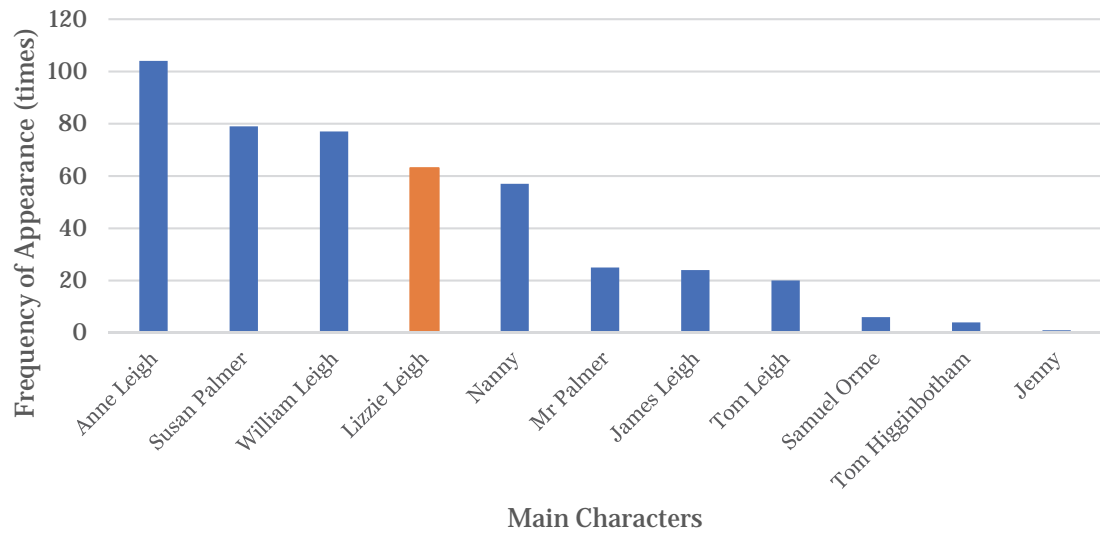


Fig. 12. Main Characters' Frequency of Appearance in "Lizzie Leigh"

APPENDIX 4 A Chronology for "The Crooked Branch"

The story is set not "many years after the beginning of this century" ("CB" 227), i.e. 19th century, as it was originally published on pages 31-48 of the Extra Christmas Number titled *The Haunted House of All the Year Round*, dated 13 December 1859, as "The Ghost in the Garden Room," and later published in *Right at Last, and Other Tales* in 1860 by Sampson Low retitled "The Crooked Branch."⁴¹ According to the narrator, it was "thirty years ago" ("CB" 230), or presumably 30-years before the publication of the story, when Benjamin entered a grammar-school in Highminster, i.e. around 1829. Since the public-school entry age in the Victorian era was considered to be "thirteen" (Sally Mitchel 246), it should probably be reasonable to assume that Benjamin was born in 1816, and hence that the parents' "wedding-day" falls on "July eighth" ("CB" 228) of 1815 or so. Some days or weeks before their marriage day, Nathan remembers that it is "twenty year come Michaelmas next" that he was "turned off at a minute's notice, for thinking of" Bessy "for a wife," by her father ("CB" 228), i.e. his dismissal day is 29 September 1795. "A few years after" Benjamin's birth ("CB" 229), presumably in 1820, Hester's brother Jack Rose dies, and Hester brings one of his children "little Bessy" to Nab-End Farm ("CB" 229), who is probably a newly-born baby as she is four years younger than Benjamin ("CB" 230-31).

Benjamin becomes "an articled clerk in an attorney's office in Highminster" when he becomes "eighteen" ("CB" 230), when Bessy is a "little girl of fourteen" ("CB" 231), i.e. in 1834. His apprenticeship ends "two years" after ("CB" 231), i.e.

⁴¹ P&C 4: 73; Charles Dickens, ed. "The Haunted House," *All the Year Round* 2: 31-48; Uglow, *EG* 619; Sharps, *O&I* 325; Fran Baker, "Introd." lxxiii; --, "Gaskell Papers" 5; Hughes, "The Works" 31; Bacigalupo 116-17; Kranzler, Notes, *Gothic Tales* 361.

in 1836. In a “autumn” (“CB” 236) day of the year, he goes to London for catching a chance for becoming a lawyer. For the first time in a year and a half after his departure for London in 1836, Benjamin comes back to Nab-End Farm “with the primroses” (“CB” 238), which bloom in early spring, i.e. one spring day of 1838, to demand “three hundred pounds” (“CB” 240). He returns to London after “his short visit” (“CB” 246) to his “North Riding of Yorkshire” (“CB” 227) home. “About a year after” (“CB” 246) he left Nab-End Farm, i.e. in spring of 1839, Nathan receives his son’s letter of demanding “the remainder of his father’s savings” (“CB” 246). “One day” in the “summer” of the same year (“CB” 248), i.e. 1839, Nathan’s second letter to his son is returned with the “‘Dead Letter Office’ stamped on the top of it” (“CB” 248), which leads him to conclude that Benjamin is “dead!” (“CB” 249). “One day . . . near the end of November” (“CB” 253), or actually “November the twelfth” (“CB” 267), when Bessy is “nearly eight-and-twenty” (“CB” 253), i.e. in 1848 or so, as her presumed birth year is 1820, Benjamin breaks his own house with his two fellow robbers. Our calculation denotes that the burglary takes place approximately “ten years” after Benjamin’s last visit to his home which occurred in the spring of 1838. Our chronology causes a slight conflict with the chronology of the narrator, who records at this robbery night that Benjamin’s bed has been kept “in a kind of readiness for him” since he slept there last “eight or nine years ago” (“CB” 255), but it matches the historical year when Gaskell heard the story from her friends: “The story itself is *true*. . . . Mr Justice Erle & Mr Tom Taylor told it me in 1849” (*Letters* 596). A “fortnight” (“CB” 264) after the fearful night, i.e. 28 November 1848, an assize is held in York (“CB” 264), where the Huntroyds are forced to tell “a’ th’ truth” (“CB” 270). The examination above discloses that

the focus of the story is placed in the events which take place for about 30 or more years since 1815. A summary of the chronology is given in Table 3.

Year	Month	Day	Events
1795	9	29	Nathan is separated from Bessy by her father (228).
1815	7	8 (228)	Nathan's marriage with Hester (228). The husband is "upwards of forty years," or 48-49, the wife "thirty-seven" (227).
1816			the presumed year of Benjamin's birth
1820			"A few years after" Benjamin's birth (229), Hester's brother Jack Rose dies; little Bessy comes to Nab-End Farm (229).
1829			Benjamin enters a grammar school (230) presumably at the age of 13.
1834			18-year-old Benjamin (230) apprenticed to Attorney Lawson (230)
1836	autumn (236)		Benjamin's "two year" (231) apprentice ended (231). He is 20; Bessy 16 (231).
		one day	Nathan knows Benjamin's plan of going to London "for a year or two" (231).
		next morning (233)	Nathan's visit to his son's master Mr Lawson (233-34)
		next day (234)	Benjamin comes home (234)
		a week or two (234) later	Benjamin leaves for London (236).
1836-37	winter (237)		"a dreary, miserable winter" (237)
1837	spring (237)		Nathan tells "sad reports about his only child" to Hester, who proposes to keep them from Bessy (237).
1837-38	another winter (238)		"another winter, yet more miserable than the last" (238)
1838	spring (238)	one day	Benjamin comes home (238) for the first time in a year and a half years. He is 21-22, Bessy 17-18.
		next day (239)	Benjamin demands £300 from his father (240).
		next day (244)	Nathan takes Benjamin to Rippon Bank, Highminster, to send £200 to London (244-45).
		next day (245)	Benjamin's return to London (245-46)
1839 (246)	spring (246)	one day (246)	Benjamin's letter of demanding "the remainder of his father's savings" (246); Nathan sends him a letter of rejection (246); Bessy sends him her money (246).
	summer (248)	one day (248)	Nathan's second letter to Benjamin returned (248-49). He thinks Benjamin is dead (249).
		many days (250)	Nathan looks "ten years" older after "the week of bed" (250).
	few months (251)		Bessy looks "middle-aged" (251), although she is 19 or so actually.
		one evening (252)	Nathan tells Hester and Bessy the neighbouring farmer Job Kirkby's offer of buying most of his land (252).
1848	11 (253, 267)	12 (267)	Benjamin and his two fellow robbers break the house.
		13 (263)	John Kirkby brings Dr Preston.
		28 (264)	In an assize in York (264), the truth is disclosed by the Huntroys (270).

Table 3. A Chronology for "The Crooked Branch"

APPENDIX 5 A Chronology for "Crowley Castle"

The comprehensive chronology consists of timeline, shift of places, and characters' activities. The story is divided into scenes according to the shift of time, a new character's appearance into a scene, and the change of places. Then, each of the main characters' activities is examined scene by scene by giving two points if a character is active, one point if he/she is referred to by other characters including the narrator, and no point if he/she makes no appearance. The time in the storyline is determined by the time indicator—such as references to years, seasons, and days—or surmised by historical events mentioned in the text. Furthermore, the place of action is identified by place names or references to places. The length of a scene is calculated by the number of pages allocated to each scene. The data gained should become a helpful tool for recognizing an objective aspect of the text.

In the introductory paragraphs, the narrator elucidates that "Sir Mark Crowley . . . the last baronet of his name" died "nearly a century" ago, or presumably "in the year 1772" (P&C 4: 339). In consideration of Sharps' "persuasive evidence" ("Notes," P&C 4: 493) that the material for the story was taken from Gaskell's visit to Eastbourne in mid September, 1862 (*O&I* 449; *Letters* 693, 696), it should be reasonable to suppose that, although the gap of 10 years might appear a little long, the narrator's "nearly a century" actually means 90 years. If so, it turns out that she is writing the story in 1863 based on what she heard at her visit to the ruins of the "great old Norman castle" "Last year" (P&C 4: 339), i.e. in 1862. This corresponds to the historical facts—Gaskell's visit to the castle was 1862, and her tale was written in late 1863 (Uglow, *EG* 553; P&C 337) and published in the

Extra Christmas Number of *All the Year Round* dated 3 December 1863 (Dickens, *AYR* 10: 12-25; P&C 337).

The story begins with the death of Amelia Lady Crowley, Theresa Crowley's mother, "in 1756" (P&C 4: 339), when the protagonist of this sad story is "only a tiny girl" (P&C 4: 339). How old she is at that time is unclear. Should we surmise that she is four in that year, i.e. her birth year is 1752, the following timeline flows smoothly. The first key event in the story—Theresa's tyranny over Bessy, her childhood companion, in their lesson, her cousin Duke Brownlow's remonstrance, and her subsequent apology to her learning mate (P&C 4: 341-43)—takes place when she is "about fifteen" (P&C 4: 343), i.e. in 1767, when Duke is 22 or 23, as he is "seven or eight years older than his cousin" (P&C 4: 340). This year, he leaves England for Europe for a three-year grand tour (P&C 4: 343). About "two years after Duke's departure" (P&C 4: 345), i.e. 1769, Sir Mark, Theresa's father, chooses Paris as the place for spending the coming winter, partly because of his trouble in London, the king's place of residence, although he was at that time "a very tolerably faithful subject of King George the Third" (P&C 4: 345), who was enthroned in 1760 ("Notes," P&C 4: 494). The time flow of our chronology goes smoothly without causing any contradiction with this historical event.

It is about "three months" prior to the expiration of the "three years" (P&C 4: 343, 344) allocated to his grand tour (P&C 4: 347) when Theresa makes a "stolen marriage" (P&C 4: 348), in other words, a reckless marriage without her father's consent, with Adolphe the Count de Grange in Paris. As Duke is about 25 or 26 years old then, his cousin Theresa should be about 18 years old. "A fortnight" (P&C 4: 354) after her husband Adolphe is dead "with a sword-wound received in some infamous struggle" (P&C 4: 353), or perhaps in a duel whose morality is

talked against by Duke (P&C 4: 343), the prodigal returns to Crowley Castle. Our chronology clarifies that Theresa's marriage takes place during the "winter" (P&C 4: 345) of early 1770, that the marriage between Duke and Bessy occurs probably soon after "spring" (P&C 4: 350) of 1771, that their first child Mary is born next year (P&C 4: 351), in 1772, and that, when Theresa is "twenty years" (P&C 4: 353) old, i.e. 1772, her husband is dead. It turns out, hence, that her first marriage has lasted only for two or three years at most. The narrator's remark, "None ever knew how much she had suffered since she had left home" (P&C 4: 354), accordingly, implies that the time of her suffering is two or three years. However, the narrator's subsequent remark that Theresa's nurse "Victorine's own temper . . . was not improved by her four years abroad" (P&C 4: 355) denotes Theresa's first marriage lasted "four years." This contradiction is probably an example of the author's careless calculation of time (Uglow, *EG* 580). The little Mary, Bessy's daughter, is a "three-year-old maiden" (P&C 4: 362), in, according to our chronology, 1776, which almost matches our timeline, as her birth year is 1772. Actually, the date of Adolphe's accidental death prior to Theresa's subsequent return to Crowley Castle is unspecified, but, if we accept Victorine's confession that her lady stayed in Paris for "four years" (P&C 4: 355), the date should fall on some time in late 1773, as the couple marry presumably in early 1770. In addition, if Victorine's calculation were correct, since Sir Mark dies "in the autumn after Theresa's return" (P&C 4: 355), the date of his death should fall on a day in the autumn of 1774, which contradicts the presumed year of his death "1772" in the introductory section of this tale (P&C 4: 339). The editor of the P&C edition considers that 1772 is not the year of Sir Mark's death but the year around which "the following events took place" ("Notes," P&C 4: 561). Our chronology matches the presumption that 1772 denotes the year

of Sir Mark's death. Considering the narrator's intention to set her story in the historical context which is revealed in her insertion of three references to concrete years in the introductory paragraphs, we cannot help judging that Victorine's calculation is wrong.

year	month	day	Scene No.	Range	length	%	Place	God/Lord	narrator	Theresa	Victorine	Duke	Bessy	Sir Mark	Amelia	Madam Hawtrej	Revd. Hawtrej	Mary Brownlow	Revd. Roberts	Count Adolphe	Duchesse de G	Events
1862	9 (J. G. Sharps, O&I 449)		1	339	0.75	2.83	Castle	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	The narrator hears the following story at her visit at Crowley Castle in Sussex (339).
1752																						Birth of Theresa
1756			2	339-40	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	Death of Amelia Lady Crowley (339); Sir Mark's daughter and nephew (340).
1756-67			3	340	0.25	0.943	village inn	0	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	The narrator sees Theresa's portrait (340).
			4	340	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	Victorine's influence on Theresa in power and affection; her self-sacrificing nursing of the child (340)
			5	340-41	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	Victorine's influence over Sir Mark (340-41)
			6	341	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	Madam Hawtrej is careful not to oppose Victorine; contrast between Theresa and Bessy.
			7	341	0.5	1.887	Castle	0	0	2	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Duke's remonstrance with Theresa for her tyranny over Bessy.
1767			8	341-42	0.5	1.887	Castle	0	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Victorine's caresses and speeches for Theresa
		one day (341)	9	342-43	0.75	2.83	parson-age	0	0	2	1	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	Theresa's apology to Bessy, and Bessy's willing forgiveness
			10	343	0.25	0.943	parson-age	0	0	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Duke sees Theresa and Bessy making puddings.
			11	343	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	mutual affection between Sir Mark and his nephew heir Duke
			12	343	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Duke's graduation from Oxford; Theresa 15, Bessy 15 or 16 (343).
1769 (345)			13	343	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Theresa's response to her father's plan of matching her with Duke.
			14	323-44	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	Duke's future plan: grand tour, political ambition, and marriage with Theresa
		one day (344)	15	344	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Sir Mark's request for postponing Theresa's formal engagement to Duke
		next day (344)	16	344	0.25	0.943	parson-age	0	0	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	Duke's farewell greetings before starting a grand tour
			17	344	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	1	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Theresa's refusal of a farewell kiss on Duke
1769 (345)			18	344-45	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	1	1	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	Sir Mark's preference of Paris to London
	11	1	19	345	0.5	1.887	Castle	0	0	2	2	1	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	Sir Mark's announcement of staying in Paris for the coming winter
			20	345-46	0.25	0.943	Paris	0	0	2	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	Sir Mark family's arrival at Paris
1769-70	winter (345)	next day (346) and later	21	346-47	1	3.774	Paris	0	0	2	2	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	Theresa's luxurious life in Paris
		one day (347)	22	347	0.5	1.887	Paris	0	0	2	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	Sir Mark's reading to Theresa Duke's reply
			23	347-48	0.5	1.887	Paris	0	0	2	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	Theresa's "stolen marriage" with Adolphe during Sir Mark's three-month absence

1770	spring		24	348	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	some ado between Sir Mark and Adolphe about Theresa's inheritance
	spring to summer (348)		25	348	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	Duke's return home; Sir Mark restores him to favour.
	spring		26	348-49	0.75	2.83	Paris	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	Duke's visit to Theresa at Paris
	spring to summer (348)		27	349	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Duke's kindness to Sir Mark
			28	349	0.25	0.943	Castle/parsonage	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	Duke's visit to the Parsonage
1771 (350)	spring (350)		29	349-50	0.5	1.887	Castle/parsonage	0	0	1	0	2	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	Duke is drawn to Bessy.
			30	350	0.5	1.887	Castle/parsonage	1	0	0	0	2	2	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	Duke's proposal to Bessy
			31	350	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	Theresa's letters are "like arrows of pain" to Sir Mark.
			32	350-51	0.5	1.887	Paris	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	Theresa's wretched married life
			33	351	0.5	1.887	Paris	0	0	2	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	Three letters of announcing Duke's marriage to Bessy reach Theresa.
1772 (361)	spring		34	351	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	1	0	2	2	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	Birth of Mary, death of Revd Hawtreay
			35	351-52	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	0	2	1	0	2	0	0	Sir Mark's disagreement to have Madam Hawtreay at Castle
			36	352	0.25	0.943	Paris	0	0	2	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Theresa's bitter regret about her ill-starred marriage; a poor prodigal
		one day (352)	37	352	0.25	0.943	Paris	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	Adolphe strikes Theresa on her shoulder.
			38	352-53	0.5	1.887	Paris	0	0	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	Theresa calls her servants; Victorine mixes a sleeping draught for her.
1773-74			39	353	0.75	2.83	Paris	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	Victorine's preparation of poison; the accidental death of Adolphe the Count de Grange
		fortnight later (354)	40	354	0.5	1.887	Castle	1	0	2	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Theresa and Victorine return to Crowley Castle.
			41	354-55	0.75	2.83	Castle	0	0	2	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Bessy's humbleness; Theresa and Sir Mark "once more on loving terms" (355); her recuperation
	autumn (355)		42	355	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Death of Sir Mark Crowley
			43	355	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	1	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Victorine's temper not improved; she treasures up her vengeance.
1773			44	355-56	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	The French nurse and the English child are capital friends.
	winter to spring (356)		45	356	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	2	0	2	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	Theresa revives out of her lassitude to an interest in all Duke's pursuits.
	autumn (356)		46	356	0.5	1.887	Castle	0	0	2	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Conflicts between Theresa and Bessy about Duke's political career
1773-74			47	356-57	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	2	0	2	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	Madam Hawtreay's jealousy of Theresa; Duke's dislike of Madam Hawtreay
			48	357	0.5	1.887	Castle	0	0	2	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Theresa's dissatisfaction with Bessy's torpor about Duke's future

year	month	day	Scene No.	Range	length	%	Place	God/Lord	narrator	Theresa	Victorine	Duke	Bessy	Sir Mark	Amelia	Madam Hawtrey	Revd. Hawtrey	Mary Brownlow	Revd. Roberts	Count Adolphe	Duchesse de G	Events
1774			49	357-58	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Duke's parliamentary recess
	some length of time (358)	one day (358)	50	358	0.5	1.887	Castle	0	0	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Bessy's nursing of her ill child; Victorine read a deeper secret in Theresa's heart (358)
			51	358	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	2	2	2	2	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	death of the baby heir of illness
		night/next morning	52	358-59	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Death of Bessy (359, 361)
	over many months (359)		53	359	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	2	0	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	Bessy's death overwhelms Theresa with grief and remorse.
1775	autumn (359)		54	359	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	2	0	2	1	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	Duke stays at Castle
	autumn (359)		55	359	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	2	1	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	Theresa is pledged to become Duke's wife; Madam Hawtrey leaves Castle for a village lodging.
	parliamentary season (359)		56	359-60	0.5	1.887	Castle	0	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Victorine in advanced life
1776		one day	57	360-61	1.25	4.717	London	1	0	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Victorine's sin is confessed to Theresa
		shortly after (361)	58	361	0.5	1.887	London	0	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Theresa's return to Crowley Castle; Duke's regret
	summer (362)		59	362	0.5	1.887	Castle	0	0	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	Victorine's health declines. Mary is "three-year-old" (362)
			60	362	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	Theresa' drooping; her devotion to Madam Hawtrey.
			61	362-63	0.5	1.887	Castle	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	Duke comes down to see his darling; the doctor's recommendation of the change of air
			62	363	0.25	0.943	to Brighton	0	0	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Duke takes Theresa to Brighton, leaving Victorine at Crowley Castle.
			63	363-64	0.5	1.887	Castle	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	Victorine's confession of truth in delirium
	a happy day (364)		64	364	0.25	0.943	a village	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	On his way to London. Duke has Madam Hawtrey's note requiring his immediate return to Castle.
			65	364	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	Revd. Roberts lets Duke read his note of Victorine's confession.
			66	364-65	0.5	1.887	Castle	1	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	Duke's interview with Victorine on her death bed; death of Victorine
around 1792			67	365	0.25	0.943	Castle	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	Duke sends for Mary, and forgets almost everything but Bessy.
		a day or two later	68	365	0.25	0.943	Brighton	0	0	2	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	Theresa receives Duke's note of explanation, and chases Duke in vain.
		after long years	69	365	0.25	0.943	Dover	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	Theresa is buried in Dover churchyard; Duke returns to England; Castle is sold to a stranger

APPENDIX 6 Characters' Interaction in "Crowley Castle"

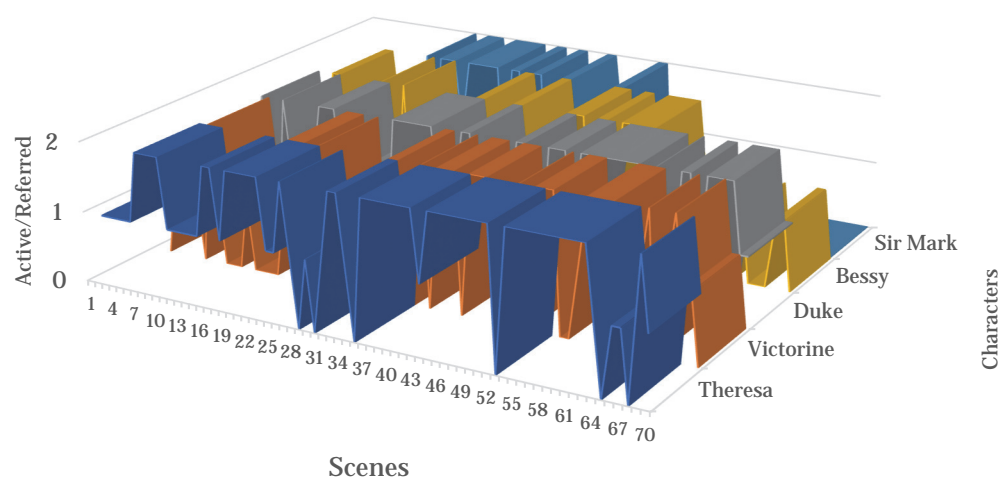


Fig. 13. Interactions of the Five Main Characters in "Crowley Castle"

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